THE GOP'S MASTERS OF DECEPTION

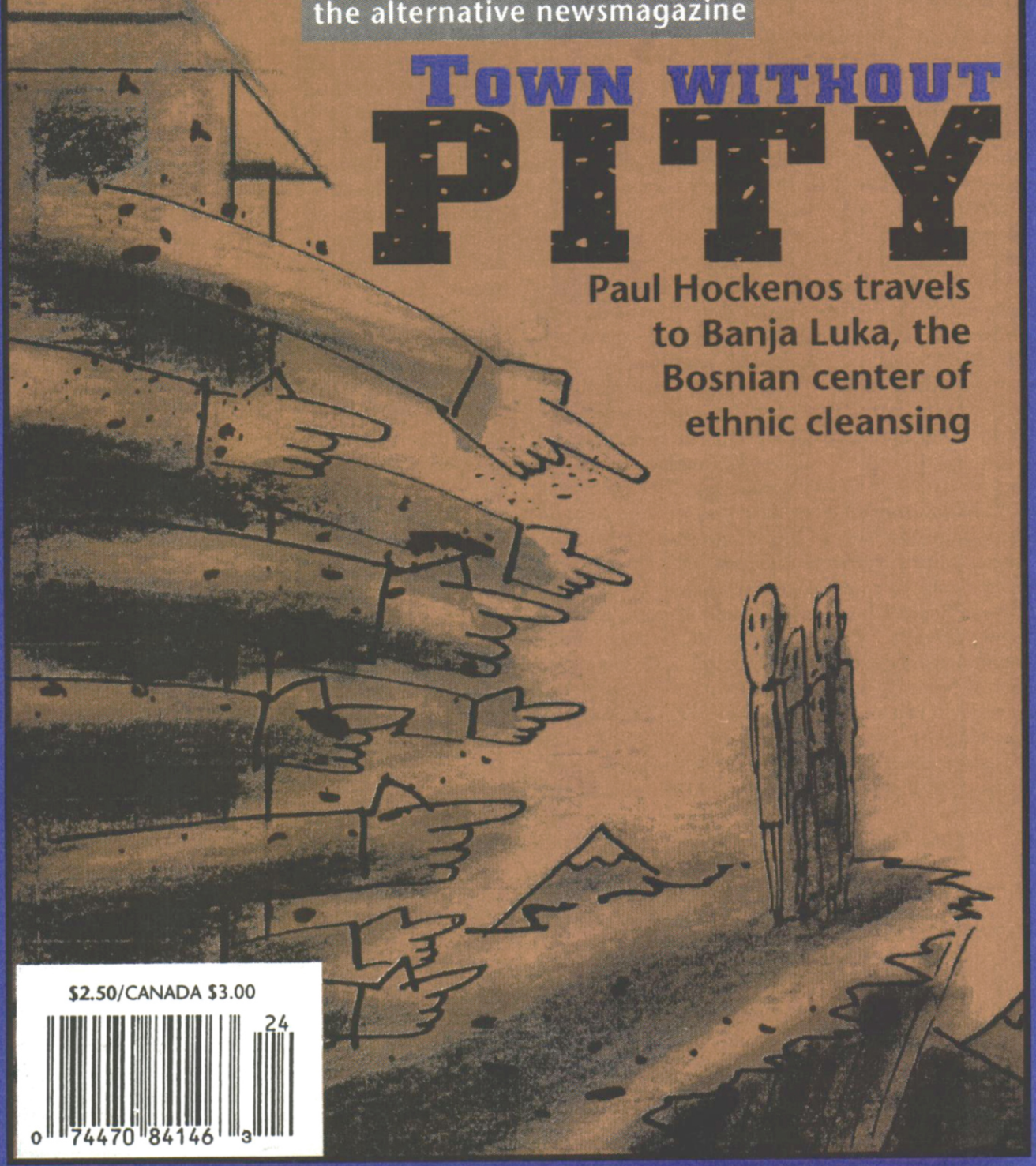
June 12 -25, 1995

In THESE TIMES

the alternative newsmagazine

TOWN WITHOUT PITY

Paul Hockenos travels to Banja Luka, the Bosnian center of ethnic cleansing



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EDITORIAL

SOCIAL INSECURITY

In a proposal that would destroy Social Security under the guise of saving it, a bipartisan duo of senators—Bob Kerrey (D-NE) and Alan K. Simpson (R-WY)—has suggested raising the age of full eligibility from 65 to 70, limiting cost-of-living increases and reducing these adjustments still further for all but the poorest 30 percent of recipients. Simpson and Kerrey would also divert one-third of the employee's share of Social Security payroll tax to a private investment fund and mandate that one-fourth of the Social Security Trust Fund be invested in private securities. They offer two central arguments for these proposals. First, they say that the Social Security Fund will go bust by the year 2031. Second, they argue that private savings will provide capital for investment to create jobs and wealth.

These proposals come at a time when the Republican-controlled Congress and the White House have made deficit reduction and balancing the budget the litmus test of responsible government. Not surprisingly, given GOP attacks on freeloaders and dependency, the Republicans have made entitlements their main targets. And because Medicare and Social Security are entitlements that make up the largest part of federal expenditures, they have become targets of choice for unscrupulous politicians.

What the Republicans choose not to emphasize, however, is that there are two kinds of entitlements: those funded through general revenues raised by income taxes, and those like Social Security, Medicare Part A, Federal Employee Retirement and Disability, and Unemployment Compensation that are funded by special taxes dedicated to a specific purpose. Not only are these dedicated entitlements no drain on the budget, but they help mask the true dimensions of the deficit by consistently running surpluses, which are then incorporated into the budget. In 1994, for example, surpluses from dedicated entitlements funded deficit spending to the tune of $100 billion.

Saving Social Security through better investment.

Still, there is a real threat to Social Security and Medicare, which doesn't come from the large sums paid out, but from the way in which these funds are invested. In 1994, for example, Social Security payments cost $321 billion, but Social Security taxes alone brought in more than $370 billion. By law, these surplus fund balances must be invested in interest-bearing Treasury securities, and theoretically this would create an ever-growing fund capable of paying out benefits for generations. But since 1969, when the government began using Social Security surpluses to fund the deficit, it has not actually paid the interest it owes. Instead, it merely gives Social Security and Medicare what amounts to an IOU. This means that as payouts increase, as the huge cohort of '60s baby boomers approaches retirement age, and as receipts drop off, due to a decline in the number of workers paying into the fund, we will reach a point where annual surpluses turn into annual deficits.

At that point, of course, the Social Security and Medicare funds will still have hundreds of billions of dollars of principal, and that should make up the program's annual deficits until 2031. In addition, the Treasury will owe these funds all the interest that has been accumulating, unpaid, for decades. That money, if it is to be paid out, would then have to be raised by general taxes. And thus the crisis.

But there is a way out. Instead of investing the Social Security surplus in Treasury IOUs, the government could invest them in the private sector through high-grade bond or stock index funds. This would accomplish several things. First, it would fully separate Social Security and Medicare funds from general federal funds (as was the case from 1939, when Social Security began, until 1969), thereby forcing the government to deal honestly with the deficit. Second, it would enable the trustees of the funds to get a higher interest rate on their balances, and therefore to protect the funds. Third, interest on these balances would be paid by the private sector, rather than by federal funds raised from taxes; in effect this would be a progressive tax on business, rather than the current regressive payroll taxes. This is now being done in Sweden.

Such a system should appeal to the champions of privatization without in any way threatening Social Security as a universal benefit. Indeed, this approach would help protect Social Security's universal status. And it would force Congress to confront the true welfare queens of federal largesse, the military, the CIA and other intelligence services, and the corporate special interests who now enjoy billions in federal subsidies that the Republicans dare not touch. ◀

Aufderwiedersehen

With this issue, *ITT* bids goodbye to Senior Editor Pat Aufderheide, who has a Fulbright grant to study the telecommunications industry in Brazil. We will miss Aufderheide's always insightful reviews and the stalwart reporting in her "Media Beat" column, but the good news is that she'll be returning in a year. In the meantime, Jennifer Gonnerman, a media and political reporter who contributes regularly to the *Village Voice,* will be taking over our media coverage.

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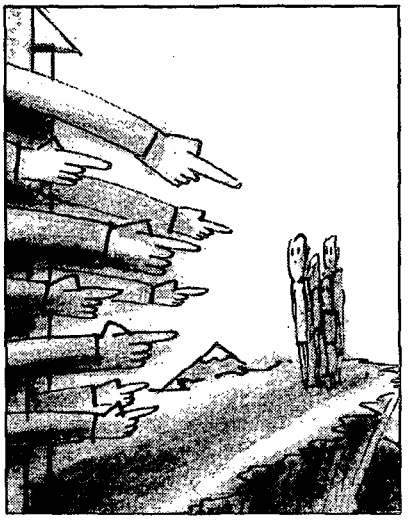
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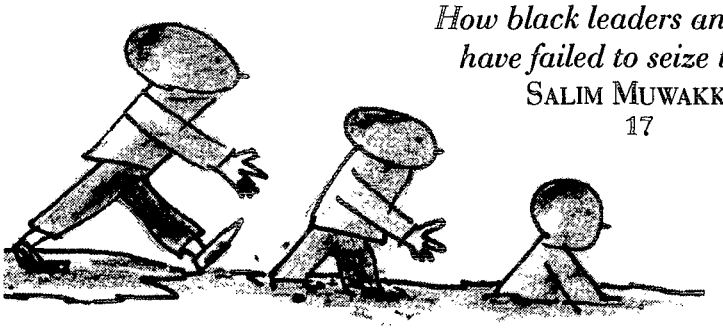


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LETTERS

Public defenders

Not long ago, the Big Three automakers were whining that building a safe, powerful, fuel-efficient car was impossible—yet determined engineers in Japan proved them wrong. IBM said small, powerful personal computers couldn't be built, and even if they could, they would not sell. Yet two guys in a garage named Jobs and Wozniak proved them wrong.

As is so often the case, having a vision goes a long way toward predicting our future success or failure.

Andy Feeney's criticism ("Letters," *ITT*, May 15) of the Native Forest Council's call to end all damaging and destructive subsidized logging, grazing and drilling on public lands only helps perpetuate "wise use" propaganda. Notably, it lends credence to the claim that rural communities must be publicly supported and maintained even though the natural resources they are extracting are already 90 percent depleted. "Wise use" supporters remain wedded to this view in spite of the fact that more viable, non-destructive alternatives to the wholesale degradation of public lands are available.

It seems strange that Feeney, who claims to support "green politics," would echo industry's charge that regulations to protect public assets and property constitute a "war on the West."

No, it's industry and their pawns, not government regulators, who are warring on the West, destroying the public's air, soil and water. Even land that is owned by the American people has been given away by the pusillanimous "green politics" of Feeney and company, who seem so afraid to stand up to the bullies and tell the truth. It's high time we asked ourselves what's right and what's wrong. Who benefits and who pays? And what is the cost of massive forest destruction to the American people?

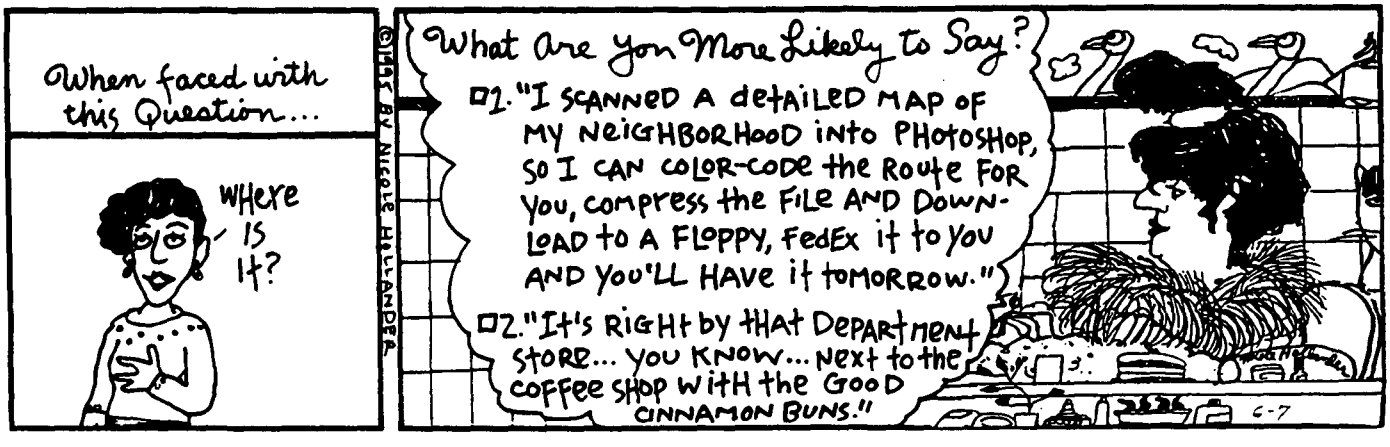
Some time ago, the Native Forest Council issued a challenge to debate this stand with any opponent, any time, anywhere. We welcome the opportunity to debate anyone opposed to ending further liquidation of public assets, including the wise-use movement, Rush Limbaugh and the Sierra Club. Our position, well substantiated by ecological and economic fact, is simply this: There is no credible justification for continued logging or grazing on public lands, and there is every good reason to stop. Public lands should be set aside for public purpose; they should not be exploited for private profit.

It's too easy and too simplistic to dismiss something as impossible or politically unrealistic when one hasn't struggled to make it possible. Civil rights, women's voting rights, child labor laws—breakthroughs for the greater public good have always been achieved over huge opposition. Change occurred because these causes had undaunted and uncompromising advocates.

Even in Congress, if we had the collective will and the guts to fight, we could pass legislation protecting public lands from industrial extraction. Why? Because it's the only sensible thing to do. And an honest full-cost accounting proves it.

Tim Hermach
Executive Director
Native Forest Council
Eugene, Ore.

SYLVIA by Nicole Hollander



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Cowboy welfare

Andy Feeney ("Letters," *ITT*, May 15) called the Native Forest Council to task for advocating a total ban on logging, mining and grazing on public lands. He moans that such a ban is a pipe dream, a declaration of war on many Western communities and, further, impossible to get through Congress. The truth is that only a tiny proportion of Westerners are engaged in extractive and grazing industries on public lands. They should grow up and learn to do without "cowboy welfare" just as the rest of us do. Sure, there is going to be some hurting when we begin to enforce environmental laws—nobody said it was going to be painless—but now is the time to begin to restore the planet's ecosystems. The place to start is on our public lands. Some people are going to have to reconstruct their lifestyles. We can no longer allow our rivers, streams and forests to be devastated for the benefit of the few.

Sadly, by April 7 both the House and Senate had passed the phony, sick, fraudulent "salvage-in-the-name-of-forest health" rider with the 1995 Budget Recision Act. This God-awful act allows the timber industry to loot the last of our wild forests and ignore the Endangered Species Act and the public appeals process. Yes, our Congress approved this atrocity! Write them and scream bloody murder about it. Those legislators who voted against it should be thanked for having common sense.

Feeney should have attacked our elected officials in Washington—not people who are trying to restore a degree of sanity to public lands policy.

Shane Thurrock
Edgewood, N.M.

37 percent solution

In his otherwise excellent article on the Service Employees International Union's (SEIU) Justice for Janitors campaign ("Cleaning house" *ITT*, May 1), Zack Nauth erroneously asserts that the SEIU devotes a larger portion of its budget to organizing than any other American or international union. Nauth claims that the SEIU sum represents one-third of an annual budget of $55 million. A review of documents that unions must file with the Labor Department as required by the Landrum-Griffin Act reveals that the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) devotes a larger portion of its resources to organizing—37.1 percent out of an annual budget of $73.4 million—than any other bona fide union does.

The larger issue is that much of the difficulty that the American labor movement finds itself in is the result of a failure to attempt to organize low-wage workers in the service sector. Unions such as the AFT have achieved consistent growth over the last two decades by focusing on America's most vulnerable employees, including paraprofessionals, school-related personnel, part-time college faculty, and workers in health and human service occupations in the public and private sector. In sum, the task today is the same as that of the '30s—to organize low-wage workers so that they can earn a living wage.

Rich Klimmer
Washington, D.C.

The cult of secrecy

Michael J. Liuzzo's view of the value of the CIA ("Letters," *ITT*, May 15) pushes too many of my buttons for me to say nothing.

As a psychiatrist, I spent almost 30 years helping people to stop keeping secrets from themselves. Only when people are able to see what they have been hiding from are they able to act in their own interest. I believe that a similar rule applies to nations. "Honesty is the best policy" at all levels of human relations.

The CIA is based on the belief that no one ever really tells the truth, and that it is in our interest to sneak around, finding out what is really going on. Well, what is really going on is that the CIA is helping to create and support a world in which lies are the coinage of the realm, and fear and paranoia are the result of our national policy in relation to other countries.

Liuzzo mentions four directorates in the CIA that he feels "have served the interests of national security." But these branches help to perpetuate the very problems that they are supposed to solve. Counterintelligence stimulates other nations to make their information-gathering agencies as secretive as possible, encouraging our CIA to spend ever more money finding out what they are up to. Counterterrorist agents simply make real terrorists a little more devious, and that's all that it takes to succeed. Counternarcotics agents can capture or kill thousands of drug dealers, but as long as dealing in drugs remains lucrative, the only result will be more spending on prisons—and more spending on the CIA.

What if we acted to remedy the injustices that lead to terrorism? When we frame our response to international problems so that we ask the CIA to "solve" them, we are simply hiding from the truth. Free access to information is the lifeblood of democracy. The secrecy engendered by the CIA and other "national security" agencies sickens our body politic and prevents us from seeking real cures for our problems.

I realize that my understanding of this situation will be seen by many Americans as naive, even dangerous. However, I recommend that we "downsize" the CIA as rapidly as possible, and spend our hard-earned tax dollars on better health care for all Americans, on better public education and on more public transportation. We might even invest in some jobs—designing fuel-efficient vehicles, perhaps—for those "retired" CIA agents.

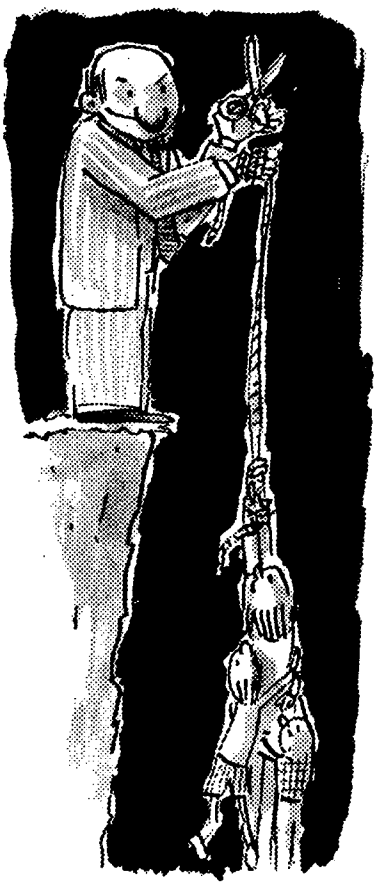
The cult of secrecy is a serious threat to our national security. Consider what life in your family would be like if everyone were basically suspicious of everyone else, if respect, openness and love were never seen in your home. Why should it be any different on a national level?

Charles D. Johnson
Amherst, Mass.

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InSHORT

GENERAL MISERY



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In late May, the Senate Finance Committee approved a welfare reform bill that would eliminate federal welfare mandates—effectively allowing states to stop providing public aid to poor families. Montana Sen. Max Baucus, the only Democratic committee member to support the measure, denies charges that the bill would result in millions of children being thrown off the welfare rolls. Baucus says he trusts state officials to continue providing aid to the truly needy.

But many states have already shown that they are more than willing to cut off assistance to their neediest citizens. Between 1990 and 1994, 17 states reduced or eliminated their General Assistance (GA) programs, the state-financed public aid for non-elderly poor people without dependent children. In Ohio, Michigan, Illinois and Pennsylvania alone, more than 350,000 GA recipients had their benefits cut off.

The fate of those former GA clients—who have been tracked in a number of studies—provides a troubling glimpse at the possible impact of the welfare reforms Congress is now considering. "Most of [the GA clients] terminated are worse off," argues Sandra K. Danziger, a professor in social work at the University of Michigan who co-authored a study that followed up on the progress of Michigan's former recipients.

When Michigan eliminated its GA program in 1991, the state's unemployment rate was at 9.2 percent, and unemployment in the Detroit area was running at well above 10 percent. Danziger's study found that only 38 percent of Michigan's former GA clients were able to find any employment after their benefits were cut off. Many state officials justified the benefit cut-offs by suggesting that most GA recipients are young, able-bodied men who use the assis-



On the beat

London authorities seem to have done a more thorough job than strictly necessary in a recent investigation of a massage parlor on the city's west end, the *Daily Telegraph* reports. Diligent police and city inspectors paid out



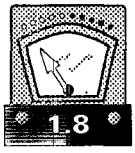
more than 2,000 pounds for 17 massages received during some 11 visits to the West One Experience massage parlor. "I am disturbed that it has taken so many visits to discover what could have been established in two," one government critic complained. "The idea that will inevitably be given to the public is that the enthusiasm of officers to investigate the matter was not unrelated to the manner of the investigation." The massages, given by young women wearing "very short white coats," were said to have been "amateurish."

Write stuff

If your lack of writing prowess sometimes leaves you high and dry, feeling like a cat on hot tin roof, a new product from Eccentric Software promises to make your writing zoom forward like a bat out of Hell. Retailing for

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only $32.98, "A Zillion Kajillion Cliches" helps to "put thousands of cliches, idioms and catch phrases at your fingertips." The program promises to be "faster than greased lightning ... and more fun than a barrel of monkeys." Well, only time will tell.



Fuhrer of my heart

The Berliner Ensemble theater is playing host to one of the stranger history lessons of recent years, the *New York Times* reports. The currently featured show, *Love Letters to Adolph Hitler*, presents a series of actual amorous epistles sent to the Nazi dictator by women admirers. It's fair to say that some of them were quite smitten. "Sweetest love, favorite of my heart, my one and only, my dearest, my truest and hottest beloved," one letter reads. "I could kiss you a thousand times and still not be satisfied. My love for you is endless, so tender, so hot and so complete." Another woman assured the Nazi leader that she had cleared everything with the folks. "[M]y parents (they could be your in-laws) say you can come any time," she wrote, "so we can spend the night together at my parents' house!"



APPALL-O-METER SCALE
1. Models Inc.-redible!
2. Infomercial irritating
3. Plausibly deniable
4. L.A.P.D. blue
5. Bob Dole-icious
6. Raoul Cédras-tic
7. Ollie North nasty
8. Holiday in Rwanda
9. Zhirinovskyesque
10. Where have you gone, Joe Goebbels?

tance to avoid finding work. But in Michigan, many of the former GA clients had significant health problems, two out of five were women, and, as Danziger's study noted, "only one recipient in 20 fit a widespread stereotype of a young urban African-American male."

In Pennsylvania, one-third of former GA recipients said "health problems kept them from working" after their benefits were terminated, according to a report published in early 1994 by the Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law. In Ohio, the number of former GA recipients who said they were unable to get needed medical care rose from 20 to 33 percent after the program was cut, the report noted. More than 25 percent said their health had worsened.

In Danziger's view, the cuts have generated enormous hidden costs. She says the loss of health benefits has forced many former GA clients to depend on costly emergency-room visits for care. And, Danziger argues, they often fail to utilize the emergency room until their ailments have reached the point at which surgery is required. Others live "doubled up" with families or friends in low-income housing, leading to a more rapid deterioration of this housing stock. The increased tensions from crowded living conditions also put added pressure on the family structure in poor communities, Danziger maintains.

If the Republican welfare legislation does become law, the conditions created by the GA cuts will be replicated on an even wider scale, warns Sandra Hauser, a staff attorney with the Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law. "The only difference is that there would be more families among those affected," Hauser says. If needy families are forced off welfare, she argues, "the crime rate in the cities will go up, there will be more people in hospital emergency rooms. It will be like pushing people off a cliff." —David Hatchett

THE CRIME RATE OF THE CENTURY

Because Mexican crime statistics are notoriously hard to come by, law professor Raphael Ruiz has taken it upon himself to become a one-man depository of Mexico City crime information. So Ruiz's word is to be taken seriously when he predicts that Mexico City—rocked by political and economic crisis—is headed for the worst annual increase in crime recorded anywhere this century. Based on increases in crime reported over the last several months, he warns that the city could easily see a 47 percent jump in the crime rate this year—a number that would be double the crimes per capita recorded as recently as 1990. Month to month, the city's crime rate grew steadily in 1994, but since last November the figures have outpaced even Ruiz's predictions.

Although the government does collect rudimentary crime data, such statistics are spread haphazardly throughout several agencies, making comparative studies difficult. So Ruiz, who has been studying the capital's crime for the last 20 years at the National Autonomous University, has spent two years logging city crime data dating to 1930 into his computer. He may be the only person anywhere with such a database. Ruiz notes that great leaps in crime rates have typically accompanied periods of extreme political upheaval, where traditional mechanisms of social control have unraveled. He has found only three instances in the past century where an increase in the crime rate of 30 percent or more from one year to the next has been recorded: Tokyo following the end of World War II; Denmark after Nazi occupiers killed off most of its

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police force; and Spain following the death of dictator Francisco Franco. "When the social fabric falls apart, we see the decomposition of a society," Ruiz says. "What we're seeing [here in Mexico] is ... the pulverization of a society."

Years of economic hardship—intensified by last January's peso devaluation crisis—are taking a grim toll on the world's largest urban center. Ruiz's statistics show a generally declining crime rate in Mexico City from 1930 through the 1970s. But beginning about 1980—with the advent of Mexico's debt crisis and the infamous "lost decade" of economic collapse—crime figures show a steep and uninterrupted increase.

While Ruiz admits that crime rates are influenced by other factors, such as the increase of single-parent families and poor educational standards, one fact is clear: rising crime has accompanied Mexico's adoption of neoliberal economic policies. "The crisis that began in 1982 forced the government to take a series of measures that without a doubt left people impoverished," he says. Moreover, he points out, the string of economic crises has sapped the government's ability and willingness to fund a wide range of social programs. "Now," Ruiz concludes, "there's no feeling of responsibility toward the people."

—Sam Quiñones

LABOR'S STRUGGLE FOR SUCCESSION

Ideally, the unfolding contest for the presidency of the AFL-CIO could trigger a healthy debate about the future of organized labor. But so far the struggle has mainly featured behind-the-scenes positioning by union leaders and a few acerbic exchanges among them.

Despite widespread discontent with his leadership, President Lane Kirkland decided last month to seek re-election. That prompted the resignation of Secretary-Treasurer Tom Donahue, who wanted the top job but didn't want to be a part of any challenge to his boss. As a result, John Sweeney, president of the 1.1 million member Service Employees International Union (SEIU), is likely to be the candidate of an expanding coalition of 21 unions that want Kirkland out. The group—which includes presidents of major unions such as the UAW, Steelworkers, Machinists, Teamsters, AFSCME, Carpenters, Painters and Mineworkers—controls 56 percent of the votes at the October convention that will elect a new president.

Meanwhile, another group has launched a defense of Kirkland and an attack on the challengers. It includes leaders of unions such as the Food and Commercial Workers, Communications Workers, Electronic Workers (IUE), Electrical Workers (IBEW), Teachers, Postal Workers, Letter Carriers, Bricklayers, Plumbers and the merging Clothing and Textile and Ladies Garment Workers (to be known as Unite!).

The division doesn't fall along clear, traditional lines of liberal vs. conservative unions or industrial and public unions against building trades. In some cases, Kirkland's defenders—though they come from diverse political camps—feel personally threatened by the idea of challenges to officers. (But then, some of the challengers have hardly been hospitable to insurgents in their own unions.) The defenders employ arguments widely used against virtually all union dissidents: The challengers (labeled "the divisionists") are splitting labor when it needs to be united, giving ammunition to employers, and failing to use the proper confidential or inside channels.

MEDIA BEAT

By Pat Aufderheide

The big grab

Congressional Republicans appear to have one rule of thumb as they draft legislation on telecommunications reform: Let the big get bigger.

It's an unhealthy approach to a real problem. We do need new policy. In 1927, when the current road map for telecommunications policy was drawn, there were no televisions or computers, and the phone company didn't offer cable service.

But the Republican solution, now in several House and Senate bills, is a little too easy: deregulate everybody in the name of competition, and hope for the best. Under the proposed legislation, most cable rates could be deregulated. Congress might let cable and telephone companies merge (which could let possible competitors simply buy out the competition), and the phone companies could get into other telecommunications-related businesses sooner than real competition would probably appear. The stage would then be set for the re-emergence of the old phone-company monopoly. Owners of broadcast stations and networks (like Fox, NBC, or Universal) could own more stations than ever before. And they could also own newspapers and cable companies in the same local markets. This would let today's vertically integrated companies—Murdoch's Newscorp, ABC/Cap Cities, Time Warner—and the metamorphosed phone/cable/computer companies of the future become one-stop-infoshops. They could stomp any remaining little guys, and make sure no new, diverse

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sources of information get big enough to bother with.

The White House has protested the bills, especially the proposed deregulation of the cable industry. But one of the more egregious give-aways in the legislation remains pretty well-hidden: the gift of new "spectrum"—that is to say, space on the airwaves—to broadcasters. Years ago, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) gave broadcasters more spectrum to transmit new digital signals for high-definition television. The broadcasters were allowed to keep their old spectrum, which carry the signals that today's TVs understand.

Now it looks like high-definition TV may be moribund. But broadcasters don't want to give that spectrum back. They want to use it for pager services, for transmitting business data and for more broadcast channels. Spectrum is money; a much smaller slice of non-broadcast spectrum was auctioned off by the FCC last year for $9 billion.

The new spectrum needs to be treated like the national resource it is. It could be auctioned, or leased, and the public could get a cut. Public television, a nonprofit children's channel, community services and more public service programming by broadcasters are all ways to make it not just pay, but pay out for the public. Several Democrats, including Joseph Lieberman (D-CT), have asked for a study. Broadcasters are digging in their heels, though—and let's not forget, they're the folks politicians have to be nice to if they want good coverage at election time.

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While the challengers claim the fight is not over personalities, but policies, Kirkland's defenders accuse them of having no agenda (true so far) and not even a candidate—just a desire to get rid of Kirkland. As part of an exchange of letters, Kirkland and his defenders charged that Sweeney, AFSCME President Gerald McEntee—the chief spokesman of the challengers—and other opponents have failed to take advantage of opportunities they had on the federation's executive council to suggest new policies.

Sweeney recently came under attack after suggesting that unions had become "irrelevant" to American workers and many of their members—even though he was simply summarizing the results of a study commissioned by the AFL-CIO. Sweeney suggested raising AFL-CIO organizing expenditures to a third of the program budget, bolstering the Organizing Institute (an underfunded effort that has succeeded mainly by keeping itself free of AFL-CIO bureaucrats), and developing new organizing strategies. Kirkland attacked his proposal as Gingrich-style budgeting that "smacks of the tactics of the right-wingers in Congress," and suggested that organizing should be the responsibility of individual unions, not AFL-CIO leaders.

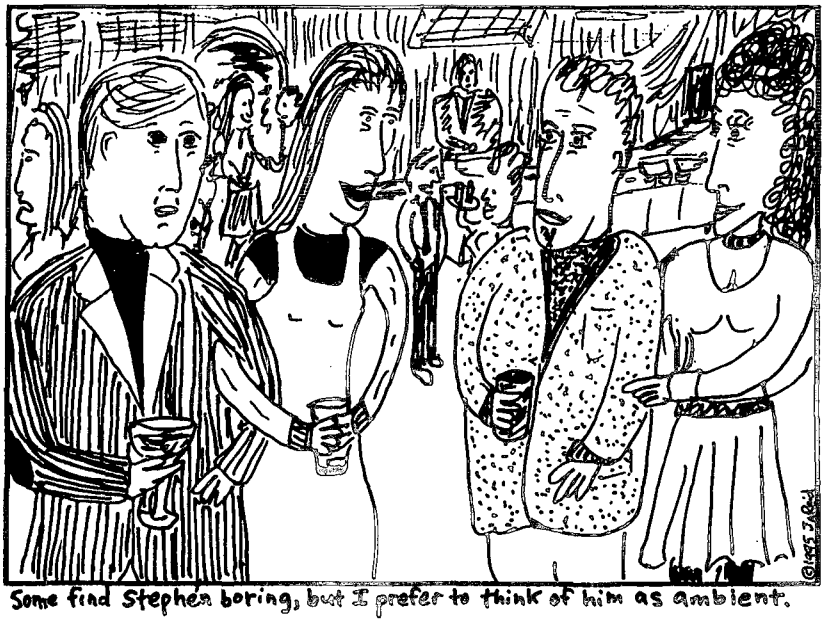
The labor movement should demand that Democrats be a "party that speaks and works on behalf of working people," Sweeney also argued, or "we'll form something else." Kirkland responded that the Democrats could best succeed by demonstrating their independence from labor—a peculiar suggestion from labor's chief.

If Sweeney runs, some liberal union leaders would like feisty and articulate Mineworkers President Richard Trumka as secretary-treasurer. But there is strong pressure within both camps to name slates—perhaps with expanded executive slots—that include minorities or women, who are grossly underrepresented at all levels of labor leadership.

Despite the nasty tone and disingenuous arguments in some of the early exchanges, there is a chance that some real issues will emerge in the election debate. If that debate continues within the broader ranks of union members after October, the election battle could help catalyze a much-needed union resurgence.

—David Moberg

ROUGH CUTS **By JA Reid**

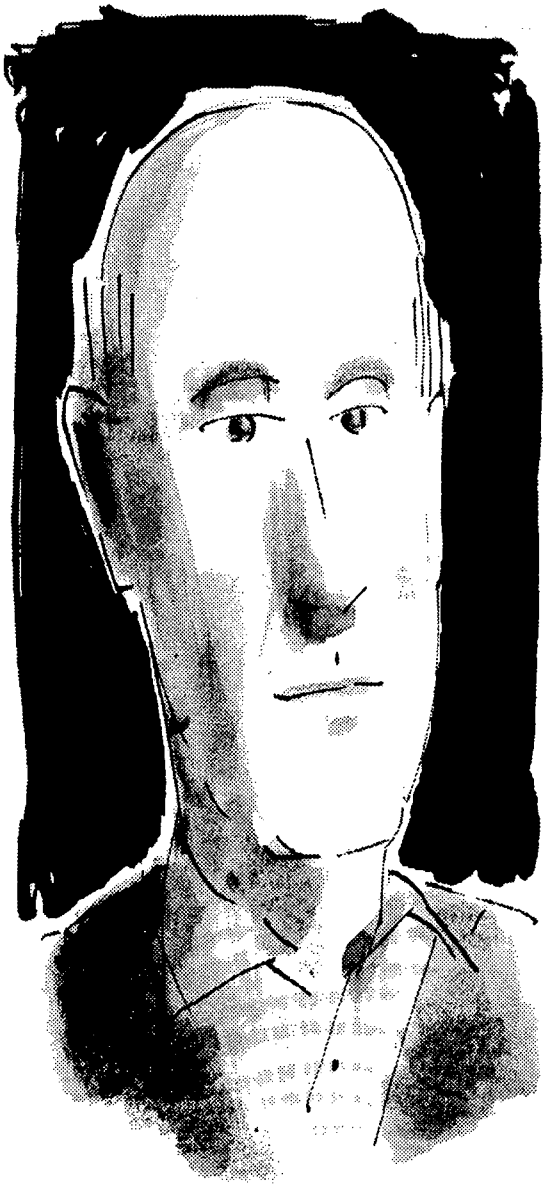


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IN PERSON

WHAT GOES AROUND...

Philip Roettinger's Guatemalan perspective



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Something has been missing from the recent press coverage of the CIA's support for a Guatemalan military that has tortured and killed more than 150,000 people.

The more enlightened pundits have mentioned that the CIA-sponsored coup in 1954 destroyed Guatemala's emerging democracy and initiated a series of brutal military dictatorships. But few reporters have pointed out that U.S. acquiescence to the bloodletting that followed has been the rule, not a policy aberration. Since the '54 coup, the Guatemalan military and the U.S. government have worked in tandem—from the '60s, when the Green Berets conducted a Vietnam-style war in Guatemala, to the '80s and early '90s, when the death squads operated with tacit U.S. encouragement.

One man who believes that this historical perspective should be filled in is Philip Roettinger, a retired U.S. Marine Corps colonel. Roettinger was among the handful of CIA operatives who in 1954 planned and executed the Guatemala coup. In a remote CIA-built base along the Honduran border with Guatemala, Roettinger organized and trained a group of rebels, who, as he has put it, were "driven by the prospect of power and wealth, not ideology."

"It was a classic operation that went off beautifully," says the 80-year-old Roettinger. "There's never been another one like it, and I'm glad."

As one of the opening salvos of the Cold War, the coup that toppled the

ETC.

By Dave Mulcahey

Voter motorvation

The hoopla about last November's Republican "mandate" ignores two important facts: First, turnout in 1994—39 percent of all eligible voters—hardly represented a significant increase over the last three mid-term elections. Second, the election was close. Of the 75 million votes cast in all congressional races, the Republican edge was just a single percentage point. "It was not a conversion election," says Richard Cloward, executive director of Human SERVE, a national voter registration reform organization. "It was a mobilization election."

The GOP won its congressional majorities thanks in large part to the Democrats' inability—or unwillingness—to register and mobilize voters as aggressively as the Republicans. But the polls may be kinder to the Democrats if the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA)—passed in 1993 and put into effect last January—withstands the current round of legal challenges trained on it.

The act, commonly referred to as "Motor Voter," requires states to make voter registration available to anyone who applies for a driver's license, public assistance, disability benefits and many other government services. It also prevents states from purging nonvoters from the rolls and requires states to allow citizens to register by mail.

The law was designed to raise American voter registration levels, currently at a paltry 63 percent, and to reduce the chronic class and racial bias of voter registration in America. According to a

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report released by Human SERVE, an NVRA watchdog group, the law is well on its way to doing so. Close to 2 million voter registration applications were received in 28 states and the District of Columbia in the first three months it was in effect. In some states the effect has been overwhelming: This year, New Mexico's registrations are 10 times higher than they were in 1993; Alabama's are six times higher. More than 400,000 citizens have applied in Florida alone because of the act.

While it is unclear to what extent the law will affect electoral outcomes, Republicans seem to be disturbed by the prospect of broader registration. Nine states with GOP governors—including California, Illinois and Michigan—have challenged the NVRA in federal courts, and six congressional bills have been introduced to block it. While the states' suits challenge the law's constitutionality, it seems clear that they are politically motivated. "If they didn't think poor people would vote, or if they thought that poor people would vote for Republicans," Cloward says, "they wouldn't be challenging it." The courts have so far uniformly upheld the law's constitutionality, but some states continue to appeal.

Cloward projects 20 million voters will register under the NVRA by 1996. And since 85 percent of registered voters consistently turn out for presidential elections—as have 70 percent of those registered at public aid offices in the past, according to studies—this mobilization could have some alarming consequences for Newt and his crew.

democratically elected government of Jacobo Arbenz was not, as President Dwight Eisenhower insisted, aimed at "preventing the establishment of a communist beachhead in the Western Hemisphere." It was a cynical manipulation of anticommunist hysteria to maintain the domination of a U.S. multinational, United Fruit, over the Guatemalan government.

But Roettinger "never got caught in the communism thing" during his time with the agency. "It was just an interesting job," he says. "Only later on I realized we weren't fighting communism at all, we were fighting the people."

Roettinger, the son of a distinguished Cincinnati judge, graduated from Ohio Wesleyan University. He joined the Marines during World War II and fought in the Pacific Theater. An accomplished marksman, he was a member of the U.S. shooting team in the 1948 Olympics in London. For a time he ran a photography studio, which he abandoned when he was recruited by the CIA. For his good work in Guatemala, the CIA rewarded Roettinger with an assignment in Mexico City. But by the early '60s, disgusted with the agency's intervention in Mexican politics, he quit the CIA and settled in the central Mexican town of San Miguel Allende to devote his time to painting portraits and landscapes and raising his family.

The spry, clear-eyed Roettinger, who still jogs daily, would have remained in obscurity as a moderately successful painter, if news of Nicaragua's contra war had not caught his attention. Reading about the Reagan administration's covert actions, he was struck by the similarities with his experience in Guatemala. In 1985, he decided to go down to Nicaragua to check out the situation for himself. On a trip alone into contra territory, he arrived at a cooperative near Esteli that had been attacked and burned the day before by the U.S.-backed rebels. Roettinger was horrified that the contras had killed several civilians, including a small boy.

"I was so outraged," he recalls, "that I went right back to Managua, got a plane to Washington, and I hit that town like a ton of bricks."

In a *Los Angeles Times* op-ed piece Roettinger warned that the United States was repeating the same mistake it had made in Guatemala. "As a CIA case officer, I trained Guatemalan exiles in Honduras to invade their own country and unseat the elected president," he wrote. "The coup that I helped engineer in 1954 inaugurated an unprecedented era of intransigent military rule in Central America. Generals and colonels acted with impunity to wipe out dissent and garner wealth for themselves and their cronies." Working with Iowa Sen. Tom Harkin, Roettinger sought to make amends by lobbying against contra aid.

"That's when I came out, by God," he says. Roettinger, believing the CIA needed to be confronted, helped found the Association of National Security Alumni. Roettinger sees his work with the association as an obligation to set the record straight. It does this in part through a quarterly magazine, *Unclassified*. "We have credibility. They have to believe us," says Roettinger.

The group, comprised of veterans of the national security establishment, helped Sen. Patrick Moynihan (D-NY) prepare a bill to abolish the CIA. And Roettinger is hopeful that Americans, in light of the latest Guatemalan scandal, will begin to re-evaluate the role of the agency. But he worries that people will fall for the tale that the CIA's involvement with Guatemala's death squads was an isolated incident. The blame, he says, must be placed where it belongs.

"What people have to understand is that the CIA works for the U.S. government. It doesn't set policy. It executes the policy of the government."

—Jacob Bernstein

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THE FIRST STONE

LIES, DAMN LIES & GOP ANECDOTES

Ronald Reagan, when caught in a lie, would claim he misspoke. His ideological heirs, who now control Congress, don't even bother making excuses.

In the past six months the Republicans in Congress have passed laws that would dismantle decades of regulations that protect the health and safety of U.S. citizens. Republicans have promoted this deregulatory agenda through "misstatements of fact," as official fibs were called during the Reagan era. And like Reagan, these elected prevaricators have not been called to account because the national media, consumed with a fear of appearing partisan, has trouble explaining the difference between political opinion and demonstrable fact.

Citizens for Sensible Safeguards, a coalition of more than 230 liberal organizations, hopes that *Myths & Consequences* will help citizens take their elected officials to task. This anthology of tall tales from the 104th Congress, which was released by the group last month, decries a civic discourse that "has degenerated into a contest of who can announce the most egregious injustice perpetuated by federal regulation—whether true or untrue."

Gary Bass, the executive director of OMB Watch, a Washington organization that monitors the Office of Management and Budget, chairs the coalition. He acknowledges that all politicians twist the truth some of the time, but contends that the current Republican Congress has crossed a new threshold of mendacity. "False statements aren't just here and there; they have become the core of the debate on the House floor," he asserts.

And no one is more blatant than Rep. David McIntosh (R-IN), who sharpened his political teeth in the early '90s as the head of former Vice President Dan Quayle's Council on Competitiveness.

On February 23, McIntosh took to the floor to defend the Regulatory Transition Act, which would place a moratorium on federal regulations. He thundered: "Bill Clinton is the Regulator in Chief, leading an army of unelected bureaucrats whose sole job is to churn out red tape that destroys jobs and turns hardworking Americans into common criminals." McIntosh backs up these serious charges with examples that are compelling and persuasive. Unfortunately, not one of them is true.

McIntosh has gotten a great deal of media attention with an attack on a new regulation that he claimed was proposed by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). As the *Indianapolis Star* reported, during that February debate McIntosh hoisted up a neon-yellow plastic industrial bucket with a hole. And as the confetti that filled the bucket sprinkled down, McIntosh explained that the CPSC wanted to "require that all buckets have a hole in the bottom of them, so that they can allow water to go through and avoid the danger of somebody falling face down into the bucket and drowning."

The fact of the matter was that the CPSC is only requiring that the makers of five-gallon buckets include a warning label. And for good reason. Drowning in five-gallon buckets is the 14th leading cause of death in children under the age of 15. In the past 10 years, some 500 babies have drowned by falling headfirst into such buckets.

Even though the CPSC promptly set McIntosh right in a letter released to the public, days later he repeated this misstatement on the op-ed page of the *Indianapolis Star*. Weeks later, he again reiterated the "leaky bucket" lie in testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee. To its discredit, the *Indianapolis Star*, Indiana's newspaper of record, has not once set the record straight.

McIntosh is not happy that *Myths & Consequences* is challenging him on this. According to OMB Watch's Bass, McIntosh's counsel, John Praed, called their office to complain and quibble about the number of dead babies, saying that 250, not 500, babies have drowned in buckets in the last decade. For its part, the CPSC says it can verify 500 deaths.

McIntosh also claims that the federal government is trying to put the tooth fairy out of business. He charges that regulations advanced by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) "would require that all baby teeth be disposed of as hazardous waste material, rather than given back to the parents to allow the tooth fairy to come back and [take the teeth]."

More nonsense. The OSHA regulation McIntosh is referring to is designed to protect health care workers from being exposed to blood-borne diseases like AIDS. OSHA leaves it up to dentists to decide how to dispose of teeth. Dentists are permitted to return teeth as long as it is done with gloves and the teeth are put in a container before they are handed back to the patient.

Rep. Joel Hefley (R-CO) charges that the government has sunk as low as regulating the use of dish soap. In April, Hefley took to the floor and, in the throes of deregulatory fever, stated: "OSHA did fine [restaurant owners] for failing to have material safety data sheets on common household

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products like Joy." No such fines have ever been levied, and OSHA regulations explicitly exempt consumer products that are used for their designed purpose.

Other OSHA critics charge that its regulations fly in the face of common sense, actually making it harder for ordinary workers to do the right thing. Rep. Jerry Weller (R-IL), during the debate on the Regulatory Transition Act, said, "One small business was fined $6,000 because an employee violated OSHA rules when he rescued a co-worker trapped under a pile of dirt." He's wrong. OSHA rules allow employees to risk their lives to save a co-worker. Moreover, he misses the point of why OSHA regulates workplace safety. Since 1990, when OSHA's safety standards for dirt trenches were enacted, fatalities from trench collapses have declined by 35 percent.

During the March debate on the Private Property Rights Act of 1995, there was a lot of misleading talk about attempts to put the rights of swamps over the rights of people. Rep. Helen Chenoweth (R-ID), a congressional freshman with ties to the militia movement, held up the example of John Pozsgai, a Pennsylvanian whose property rights were being trampled upon by runaway government. Said Chenoweth, "Mr. Pozsgai, he cleaned [the property] up, took 7,000 tires off the property and was immediately charged with criminal violations and hauled off because he had destroyed a wetland by taking tires off his property." She fails to mention that after removing the tires he filled in the wetland, which subsequently caused his neighbors' basements to flood.

The Pennsylvania office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service took exception to the portrayal of Pozsgai as an aggrieved citizen. *Newsweek*, for example, falsely reported that Pozsgai was sent to jail for "moving a mass of rusty junk and rotting tires" from a "dry stream bed." The agency's Edward Perry, in a letter to the editor of *Newsweek*, explained that Pozsgai "went to jail because he did not obey the law." In exasperation, he concluded, "It would be appropriate for someone to finally print the truth" about Pozsgai's arrest.

According to the deregulators in Congress, in addition to jailing hardworking citizens, the federal government has also decided to promote the welfare of rats over that of U.S. citizens. That is why Rep. Ken Calvert (R-CA) says he is taking aim at the Endangered Species Act.

Calvert is particularly upset about the provision that protects the endangered Stephen's kangaroo rat by regulating "disking"—the removal of vegetation around homes to provide a firebreak—in areas where the rats live. As Calvert told his congressional colleagues, the Stephens kangaroo rat has "seized control of Southern California," because federal regulations prohibit property owners from disking around their homes. "The consequence of the Endangered Species Act was disastrous and outright irresponsible," says Calvert. "Fires broke out in Southern California that destroyed 25,000 acres and 29 homes."

It is a good story, but not quite accurate. According to a July 1994 General Accounting Office report, the disking prohibition had nothing to do with the loss of homes during the California fire. Further, the federal regulation in question specifically allowed other forms of vegetation removal, such as mowing with light equipment, to create firebreaks.

Calvert's real agenda is to dismantle the Endangered Species Act, because it contains a host of regulations that control how the environment can be exploited by the agriculture, construction and resource extraction industries—industries that financed Calvert's 1994 campaign to the tune of $100,749.

Which brings up the real agenda of the members of Congress who tell these lies. They are not as concerned about taking government off our backs as ensuring that government is securely in the pocket of their corporate campaign contributors. ◀

THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH by Peter Hannan



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BOSNIA

Town without pity

A visit to the ethnically cleansed city of Banja Luka offers disturbing insights into the mentality of the Bosnian Serbs.

By Paul Hockenos
BANJA LUKA,
BOSNIA-HERCEGOVINA

For a war-drained city in an internationally isolated statelet, Banja Luka keeps an upbeat face. Nestled between two gentle mountain ranges, its broad, tree-lined streets and pastel Jugendstil façades have a prosperous, distinctly Central European flair. At one of its ubiquitous garden cafes or outdoor pizzerias, a Banja Lucko *pivo* still compares favorably to the draughts of any brewery south of Vienna or east of Prague.

Perhaps a bit snobbishly, Banja Lukans always emphasized their affinity to the cultural sphere of *Mitteleuropa* rather than to the Balkans. Even Serbs admit that before the war they felt more at home in the Croatian city of Zagreb than they did in Belgrade or Sarajevo. But today in the Bosnian Serbs' self-styled republic, Banja Luka is no longer known as a well-off university town, or as the industrial hub of northern Bosnia. The largest city in Bosnian Serb-held territory, it is now the symbolic capital of ethnic cleansing. Before the war, Banja Luka's population was roughly half Serb, half Muslim and Croat. Today, only a few non-Serbs remain in the city—and every month more leave.

The radical nature of the Bosnian Serb regime was apparent in Banja Luka long before the current crisis, during which the Bosnian Serbs have responded to NATO air strikes by bombing a cafe-lined street in Tuzla and taking more than 350 U.N. troops hostage. And Banja Luka's unenviable new stature means that Bosnian Serbs strongly discourage foreign journalists from visiting the region. For all their complaints of media bias, the Bosnian Serbs make it as difficult as possible to cover the war "from their side." No journalist makes a move anywhere in the Bosnian Serb territory without the consent of Sonja Karadzic, the republic's first lady and press officer. Among reporters, Mrs. Karadzic is considered the wicked witch of Pale, the Bosnian Serbs' village capital. And she looks every bit the part with her fluorescent green—sometimes violet or pink—fingernails and garish outfits.

All trips within the Bosnian Serb state begin in Pale, whether or not the former mountain resort outside of Sarajevo is near one's destination—which, in the case of Banja Luka, it's not. There, after securing a press card, one is sat down for an informal little chat with Branko, a gruff, barrel-chested Serb in his mid-30s. Branko explains "the Serb side" of ethnic cleansing (Muslims and Croats want to leave, we just help them), the siege of Sarajevo (they broke the latest ceasefire) and the Contact Group peace plan, which the Serbs refuse to sign (this is a war we didn't even start, why should we give up land we won?). All journalists must travel with an official interpreter in order to avoid "false interpretations," he says—the kind that have unfairly turned the world against the Serbs. One has to pay dearly for this escort, who presumably reports directly to the police afterwards. The cost is $100 a day plus all expenses—if you are given clearance at all.

Of course, some of the obstacles to travel in the Bosnian Serb territory aren't erected by Pale's press office. Passage into northern Bosnia becomes impossible when fighting erupts along the Brcko corridor—a strategic battleground of critical importance. This five-mile-wide bottleneck in northeastern Bosnia connects all of northern Bosnia and Serb-held Krajina in Croatia to eastern Bosnia and Serbia proper. Were the Bosnian government army to cut off the corridor, more than two-thirds of the territory that the Bosnian Serbs control would become a giant enclave surrounded by Croatia and government-held Bosnia.

For this reason, the corridor has recently been the scene of heavy fighting. Nevertheless, journalists traveling through Bosnian Serb territory worry less about the arbitrary bullet or piece of shrapnel—as they do in Bosnian government ter-

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ritory—than they do about the arbitrary actions of an unpredictable, despotic regime. As overused as the term "fascism" has become throughout the Balkans, the Bosnian Serb republic has all the characteristics of the real thing: concentration camps, rapidly growing contingents of secret police and paramilitary groups, and an extreme nationalist ideology. Bosnian Serbs take their enemies, real and imaginary, very seriously. Swiss and German aid workers were recently imprisoned for months on trumped-up spying charges and then expelled from the country before coming to trial.

The Bosnian Serbs, even those who defend the regime, know very well what kind of a state they live in. Nobody wants to be seen talking with a foreigner on the streets. When I finally arrived in Banja Luka, the first question my contact there whispered to me was: "Are you sure no one followed you?" He quickly whisked me off to his flat.

It was sheer good fortune that I made it there at all. The afternoon I arrived in Pale, the Croatian army launched an offensive against the Croatian Serb-held pocket in western Slavonia, which the Serbs there had controlled since 1991. The Croatian attack triggered an exodus of thousands of Croatian Serb refugees across the River Sava into the Banja Luka region. The Bosnian Serbs saw a golden opportunity for the international press to finally witness Serbs as victims—as they see themselves—and half an hour later I was whizzing through the battle-scarred Drina region toward Banja Luka.



In all of Serb-held northern Bosnia, the Muslim and Croat population has dropped off from half a million before the war to less than 70,000 today. Driving through eastern and northern Bosnia, one finds former Muslim villages that today are ransacked ghost towns, the houses picked clean of doors, windows, anything looters could carry with them. Unlike the destruction in Sarajevo or Mostar, where bullets or grenades have done most of the damage, the buildings here have been plundered by human hands.

In Banja Luka, most of the former houses of Croats and Muslims are identifiable by small blue-white-red flags that their new Serb occupants have pinned or painted on their doors. "That means a Serb lives there now," sighs Ljubica, a French teacher and child of a mixed Serb-Muslim marriage. "They *want* you to know."

The most striking physical reminders of ethnic cleansing in Banja Luka are the empty, rock-strewn lots that stand out like scars along shady shrub-lined streets. In those lots, some of the oldest and most elegant mosques in the Balkans stood before Serbian extremists dynamited them. Before the war, there were 16 mosques in Banja Luka; today not a single one is standing. In fact, there is not a minaret to be found anywhere in Serb-controlled Bosnia.

On the corner where the stately Ferhard Pasha mosque stood for 400 years, stray dogs lounge in the hot midday sun. The homeless animals belonged to Croats and Muslims who have fled the city. The first wave of ethnic cleansing, which began with the outbreak of the war in April 1992, relied on bombings, murders, rapes, mass arrests and arson to force Muslims and Croats from their homes.

"One day my grandson was stopped just outside our house here," a frail Muslim peasant woman explains as she and a friend tend a little garden patch along the sparkling River Vrbas. "He didn't have his ID card with him and they wouldn't let him get it. They took him to the police station and held him for three days. They beat him up so badly that he lay in bed for a month afterward." As a young blond-haired man on a horse-drawn cart passes us, the other woman puts a finger to her lips. "Quiet," she says. "It's those young ones from the village, there's nothing they won't do."

The women say there are fewer "problems" now than two years ago. When houses are shot at or robbed, the police are more responsive—although, in the end, nothing happens to the offenders. "We old folks, we're the only ones left now," says the woman, whose children and grandchildren are in Canada, Croatia and Sweden. "I was born here under the Austrian monarchy, and I'll die here, one way or another."

Ethnic cleansing is now in an "end phase"—the term foreign observers have assigned to the more subtle forms of intimidation that are forcing the remaining Croats and Muslims out of Bosnian Serb territory. Muslim and Croat men, for example, must perform compulsory labor service, often on the front lines. As the authorities surely anticipate, most would rather leave the country than risk their lives digging trenches on the "hot fronts."

It is now also cheaper to be ethnically cleansed. In the past, people paid 500-600 German marks ($350-450) to acquire the papers necessary to go to Western Europe. Today, the city's Civil Migration Authorities charge only 250 marks. At an informal flea market along a crumbling wall of the old city fortress, Muslims, Croats and gypsies gather to sell their last possessions to get the money to leave. On old blankets, they display record collections, tool sets, door knobs, televisions, anything they can't take with them.

Six gypsy women with colorful patchwork dresses and head scarves squat in a circle, hand-rolled cigarettes bobbing

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from their cracked lips. "One day some toughs came and said to us, 'What are you doing here anyway? Get lost or you'll be sorry,' " one woman recalls. She and her husband already have their papers to leave, but with the Croatian military offensive in western Slavonia the borders have been closed to everyone. "Now you leave," she says, motioning to me with her head, "or I may never get out of here."

Just days after the successful Croatian offensive, which retook the Slavonian pocket, Banja Luka's Roman Catholic Croat population began to feel the repercussions, just as they had feared. Four Catholic churches and a monastery were blown up, a priest and a nun killed.

At the city's Catholic cathedral, Bishop Franjo Komarica serves as a voice of tolerance as well as the unofficial spokesman for the Catholics and other minorities still in northern Bosnia. "We Catholics here have nothing to do with western Slavonia or western Hercegovina or the Croatian army, yet Serbian radicals justify this violence as retribution," says the urbane, silver-haired bishop, who began a hunger strike in late May to protest the persecution of his people.

His tone of voice and directness of manner express an urgency bordering on desperation. Two-thirds of his diocese's members have fled the country and most of the others are preparing to join them. Over the past three years, Komarica has been kidnapped several times, shot at and nearly beaten to death. "Our people have lived here for 1,700 years, and now we're on the verge of complete annihilation," he says, his voice rising and beads of sweat forming on his forehead as he speaks. "I refuse to accept that the Serbs, our Orthodox brothers, will accomplish what neither the Huns nor the Avars, the Mongols nor the Tatars, the Turks nor the communists managed to do. What a terrible, humiliating disgrace this would be for the Serbs."

Komarica maintains that the West has made itself complicit by simply watching as the Serbs' ethnic policies reach their final conclusion. "The West is tacitly accepting what is happening here," says Komarica. "I don't accept it! I refuse to talk about a definitive 'end phase' of ethnic cleansing. I want to talk about concrete provisions for the return of refugees and the protection of their human rights."

The Bosnian Serbs' goal of an "ethnically clean" territory is a logistic prerequisite to their larger dream, namely to be part of a Greater Serbia. It is Greater Serbia for which the Bosnian Serbs are fighting, and only a few express sincere remorse about the means employed to establish it. "What's happening in Banja Luka is a real tragedy," says Maria, a Serb and 29-year-old mother of two. At her wedding, her best friend, a Muslim, was her bridesmaid. "The Muslims and Muslim culture were a part of Banja Luka," she says. But still, she wonders whether the city needed 16 mosques when it only had one Orthodox church. "They shouldn't have destroyed all the mosques," she reflects, "but 16 was really too many."

Despite their military successes, the Bosnian Serbs' hopes for a speedy union with Serbia proper have been put on hold. Last year, Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic—after failing to persuade Bosnian Serb President Radovan Karadzic to accept the Contact Group peace plan—broke off relations with Pale and put the Bosnian Serb republic under sanctions. Milosevic now needs to figure out how to dump Karadzic and replace him with someone—anyone—who is ready to compromise with Belgrade, Sarajevo, Zagreb and international negotiators.

Few Bosnian Serbs really believe that the Milosevic/Karadzic split is for real or that Milosevic has backed away from his support for a Greater Serbia. They may be right, but of late Milosevic has given every indication that he realizes that establishing a Greater Serbia comprised of Serbia, Montenegro, and Serb-held Bosnia and Croatia is militarily, politically and economically unworkable. The most vivid illustration recently was Belgrade's muted response to the Croatian sweep of western Slavonia, as Milosevic let the Croats take a chunk of Greater Serbia without a fight or even a real word of protest.

After three years of fighting, the Bosnian Serbs are battle-weary and frustrated with the rampant corruption and war-profiteering that Karadzic condones. "When the war first broke out you couldn't hear a word against Karadzic," one soldier tells me. "Today, everybody curses him." It's the corruption more than the war itself or Karadzic's refusal to accept the peace plan that infuriates Bosnian Serbs. Throughout the Bosnian Serb state, war profiteers—the political elite among them—are a class unto themselves. Since Karadzic relies directly on this criminal class for his power, he refuses to clamp down on their enterprises.

Recently, Karadzic has beefed up the Bosnian Serb police forces, which are under his direct control, at the expense of the military—a move that reflects Karadzic's growing estrangement from the army leadership as well as the population. Although Belgrade is closely watching the power struggle unfold in Pale, Milosevic is simultaneously building a base of political opposition outside Karadzic's ruling party. Not surprisingly, he's focusing on Banja Luka, which even in communist Yugoslavia resented Sarajevo's authority, and now finds it unbearably humiliating to be governed from a miserable little hamlet like Pale.

But whatever their criticisms of Karadzic, most Bosnian Serbs stand firmly behind the larger political goals of their leaders. The regime's propaganda and the experience of the war have created a tightly spun logic that leads to one set of conclusions. The ultimate source of this logic is Belgrade, from which Milosevic encouraged and aided his puppet Serbian statelets from the very beginning. But as easily as Milosevic, the shrewd, cynical pragmatist, let go of western Slavonia, he could also abandon the Bosnian Serb republic. Then the Bosnian Serbs would have their economically ruined, ethnically sterile police state all to themselves. ◀

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BLACK AMERICA

The wrong march

Black leaders are following an old script for social change—one no longer relevant to today's political climate.

By Salim Muwakkil

There was something slightly pathetic about the National Rainbow Coalition (NRC) march last month from House Speaker Newt Gingrich's Marietta, Ga., district to the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s grave 30 miles away in Atlanta. The marchers, most of whom were left-leaning followers of NRC President Jesse Jackson, would be considered marginal even in the best of political times. But they seem especially forlorn now.

Their approach is not just anachronistic, many argue, but ineffective. Such tactics, grounded in the idea of moral suasion, work best when the moral message is clear. Clearly drawn issues sustain the fervor of protesters and lend their causes greater resonance in society at large. The unambiguous evil of segregation during the '50s, for example, animated the early civil rights movement. But by appropriating much of the colorblind rhetoric of the movement, latter-day conservatives have successfully clouded its message. And the contemporary left has yet to offer any clarifying vision. African-American youth are decidedly indifferent to these civil rights-style affairs. One of the more puzzling realities of the current political scene is that despite the manifest meanness of Republican policies, the left has been unable to fuel any sustained opposition.

The right has not had that problem. The April 19 bombing in Oklahoma City has thrown a public spotlight on a burgeoning right-wing militia movement and revealed the wide range of its philosophical appeal. Many discontented white Americans (most of them men) have found some solace on the extreme right. Unfortunately, its appeal is understandable: Changing economic conditions across the globe have ratcheted down the earnings and aspirations of many middle- and working-class white men. And perceived assaults on their cultural status from feminists, multiculturalists and environmentalists have heightened the anxieties of white males. As a result, the soothing messages of the far right promise them a means of reclaiming their eroding power in the world.

And on the other side of town, African-American youths and younger activists may shun civil rights-style marches, but they've been energized by the Nation of Islam's (NOI) "Million Man March" scheduled for October. References to the civil rights movement's successes ring hollow to many of these folks. As the number of black elected officials has skyrocketed, black neighborhoods have only suffered accelerated decay. Integration, far from having the noble connotations of the King era, has produced a brain drain, in which the black community's most talented members are siphoned off into predominantly white areas. And the high-profile media chatter about the popularity of white, far-right militia groups has convinced many African-Americans to look more favorably on the NOI as the only group explicitly dedicated to protecting black interests.

The small crowd of Jackson supporters marched under the banner, "From Newt's Nightmare to Dr. King's Dream," and they chanted for jobs, affordable health care, social justice and all the other issues that resonate among NRC members. Characterizing the event as the start of a "moral offensive against Gingrich's Contract with America," Jackson said the march was intended to take the battle directly to the enemy.

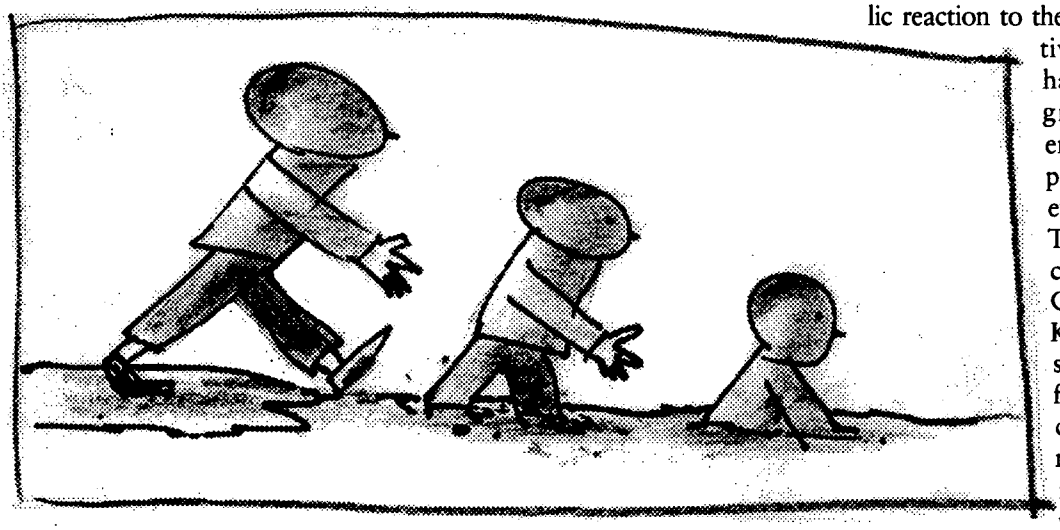
Gingrich shrugged off the protest as "PR baloney," and said that it exploited "what used to be a serious issue." The Georgia legislator said Jackson had "become a parody of

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himself." Gingrich has a gift for discerning his opponents' weaknesses, and his attack on Jackson echoes much of what is heard on the left. In recent months, Jackson increasingly has come under criticism for exploiting the left to further his personal agenda. Critics charge that Jackson has turned the NRC into a public relations vehicle for his own aggrandizement, thwarting the group's original dedication to political organizing and community activism.

Surveying the prospects for change, Jackson urged his supporters to stay the course in the current maelstrom. "When confronted with a similar or worse set of circumstances like apartheid, racism and discrimination, Dr. King fought for jobs, peace and justice, nonviolently with hope, faith and love, along with mass marches, demonstrations, prayer vigils, fasts and mass jailings," he told the gathering. "We march to continue in that great tradition."

The march also was intended to churn up publicity for the NRC's policy convention, which took place in Atlanta on May 25-27. "The Rainbow Covenant: Redeeming the Soul of America" was the convention's fanciful title. Several labor, religious and civil rights groups participated, and the Newt world order was roundly condemned.



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"We do not intend to be ignored, taken for granted, pushed off and exploited any longer," Jackson told his audience in the conference's keynote speech. He announced that the NRC will "launch an intensive voter registration drive in 50 targeted congressional districts where the extremists won with fewer votes than they won with in the previous election." He said his group will register a million more voters and "revive the spirits of the people."

The NRC's registration campaign and a proposed program—in conjunction with churches and juvenile court judges—to "reclaim" 100,000 youths through a process of mentoring and nurturing certainly sound impressive. But the conference offered few specific strategies for achieving these goals. Outlining the next steps in the struggle against the raging Republican right, Jackson concluded that through "the use of intense prayer, disciplined mass marches, a revived commitment to voter registration and economic boycotts, we must take our case for a course of humane priorities to the streets, to the legislatures, to the courts and every level of American life."

It would be unfair to fault Jackson for his efforts to energize the troops. After all, he is an articulate promoter of enlightened policies who has extensive access to the media. And who among Jackson's critics has come up with a more effective strategy? Still, the "civil rights" flavor of both the NRC march and the convention added a quaint touch that seemed decidedly out of sync with new political realities.

These realities were amply illustrated in Washington just a few days before the convention, when the Senate passed a budget plan that would effectively eviscerate federal programs that have served as social safety nets. And the Senate's plan was a pale reflection of a House budget resolution that urged even more drastic cuts in cherished social programs.

Much remains to be done before the cuts are actually implemented—and the final bill will still be subject to presidential veto. But the importance of the two budget resolutions should not be underestimated. For one thing, the public reaction to the cuts has not been as negative as many commentators had predicted. Indeed, congressional Republicans, emboldened by the public's presumed support, are urging even more extravagant cuts. The leading GOP presidential candidates—Sens. Phil Gramm of Texas and Kansas' Bob Dole—are scrambling to move even further to the right. Once considered a centrist, Dole is now embracing many of the right's cherished causes, while Gramm bills himself as "the only true conservative" in the race.

Republican leaders hailed the spirit of both resolutions as the beginning of a serious attempt to balance the budget and, perhaps more important, as a blueprint for reshaping the federal government. "What our vision is for the 21st century is a vision of taking power and money and control and influence from this city and giving it back to men and women all across this country," Budget Committee Chairman John Kasich (R-OH) said in a speech before the House vote on the GOP budget plan. Kasich's clever appropriation of populist themes illustrates how effective the Republicans have become at camouflaging their mean-spirited policies as citizen "empowerment."

As usual, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) offered an alternative plan that sought to balance the budget by gutting the defense budget and hiking corporate taxes while retaining money for education and social programs. As usual, it was rejected.

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The difference this time is that, for the first time in the CBC's 24-year history, the group is a minority voice in Congress' minority party. And it is fighting a revanchist agenda that will dramatically alter the role government has played as the custodian of social welfare—a reversal that targets black and poor Americans for the hardest hits.

This is an especially cruel reversal of fortune for the caucus, which has lost virtually all of the clout it had taken 20 years to gain. During the early years of the Clinton administration, the group claimed a record 40 members, and its political status was rising. CBC members held the chairs of three standing committees and 16 subcommittees in the House. The caucus was also an important legislative bloc that provided the margin of victory for a number of critical bills. Without the CBC's prodding, for example, it's doubtful the Clinton administration would have taken decisive action on Haiti, and the caucus played a crucial role in ensuring that social spending provisions were included in last year's omnibus crime bill. Members of the group had unprecedented access to the White House, and were increasingly regarded as important confidantes to the president.

The 1994 elections obliterated those gains in one fell swoop, and the CBC now finds itself far from the center of political power. Black leadership has vanished from the Armed Services, Government Operations and the Post Office and Civil Service committees—to say nothing of the subcommittee chairmanships on appropriations, small business, education and labor, among others.

The CBC's loss of political clout reflects the vulnerability of its constituency to the GOP's budget-cutting agenda. A 1994 report by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies—a Washington think tank that concentrates on issues concerning the African-American community—shows that CBC constituents are poorer, less educated, less likely to be employed and more dependent on government employment than the average citizen.

The caucus understands the threat implicit in that vulnerability. Last month, in an attempt to mobilize vigorous opposition to the GOP's plans, the CBC gathered black legislators from federal, state and local governments across the country at an "Emergency African-American Legislative Summit." "We are not going to simply sit around while the Republicans try their best to turn back the clock on the gains African-Americans have made over the last 30 years," said Rep. Kweisi Mfume (D-MD), past CBC president and a co-convener of the summit. "This is an outright assault on black America, and we're going to fight back."

Much like the participants at the Rainbow Conference, the legislators concluded that voter registration and political coalition-building should be the primary weapons in the struggle against the Republican attack. Conference-goers reportedly placed a premium on nuts-and-bolts proposals and showed little tolerance for the rhetorical flourishes that too often characterize such confabs. But despite the serious quest for an effective response to the GOP assault, the concluding proposals offered nothing novel.

While black elected officials and Jackson's NRC called for more activism in the electoral arena, both groups also underscored the need to generate so-called "street heat"—that is, demonstrations and boycotts that take African-Americans' concerns beyond the usual political channels. "The greatest periods of social justice in this country were accompanied by strong social movements," notes Frank Watkins, an NRC official and longtime Jackson confidante. "In fact, without that kind of movement, everything else we do is tentative."

In theory, these should be glory days for a new left-leaning social movement. The massive restructuring of the global economy is provoking such widespread economic anxiety that it seems to be following a script that could have been written by any number of left analysts. The acute polarization of the rich and poor in the United States that socialists have long forecast is taking place before our eyes. (Indeed, this gap has become so wide that even the *Wall Street Journal*'s editorial page has begun to complain that the GOP is ignoring income inequality.) The ethnic antagonisms emerging in the wake of the Cold War graphically illustrate the need for the kind of transethnic ideology that could break down the xenophobic responses to these global upheavals.

But instead of such a movement we have the GOP's Contract with America. Perhaps the movement will begin when enough people understand the tragic dimensions of that Republican promise. Perhaps not. ◁

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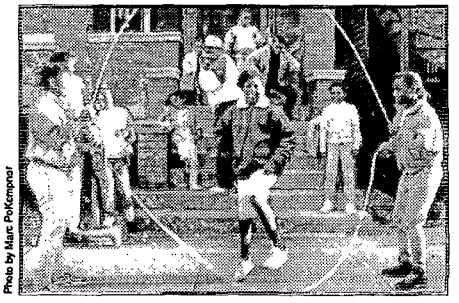


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LATIN AMERICA

Privatization party

Chile's new economic order leaves workers out in the cold.

By Fred Solowey
SANTIAGO, CHILE

"What you really should be writing about isn't Chile," the Santiago businessman says. After 10 days of my phone calls, he has allowed me to take pictures at one of his factories and is even driving me there. "You should write about how there is too much socialism and bloated government bureaucracy in your country."

Not wanting to blow my photo opportunity, I disagree without challenging his premise. "You say the U.S. is socialist," I counter, "but the Chilean government still owns El Teniente [the largest underground copper mine in the world]."

He dismisses my point: "That's one of the few things left over from communism." More precisely, military socialism. Despite the privatization campaign waged by the disciples of Milton Friedman who have run the Chilean economy ever since Gen. Augusto Pinochet's 1973 coup, El Teniente remains in government hands. And it is likely to stay that way as long as the Chilean constitution guarantees the military 10 percent of the mine's considerable revenues.

Despite my host's misuse of labels like "communist" and "socialist," he is right about one thing: Little remains of the Chile I first saw in March of 1973, when Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government, working to deliver on its promises of a better future for Chile's workers, made unprecedented gains in the off-year congressional elections. Hope was everywhere in working-class neighborhoods.

Almost 22 years later, the businessman driving me to his factory has no reason to fear the specter of a resurgent left. Nor has he cause to quibble with Chile's place in world opinion. In contrast to the condemnations, boycotts and diplomatic isolation Chile faced in the '70s, the world press today touts the country's "economic miracle." Chile has enjoyed 11 straight years of sustained, largely inflation-free economic growth, and boasts a booming stock market and a vigorously consumerist middle class. My prosperous host lives in one of the world's least regulated and best performing economies.

While the workers in his factories are unionized, Pinochet-era labor laws have kept unions weak. He can fire any worker he wants to, as long as he can justify it as a business necessity. He doesn't have to contribute a single peso toward health care or social security for his 350 employees. Before the bloody 1973 coup, by contrast, labor laws and unions were strong, and employers were required to make considerable contributions to social benefits.

Of the several factories the businessman owns, he has declined to let me take photographs at the one that makes front grilles for the Chevy Luv, the truck General Motors assembles in the northern Chilean city of Arica and exports to a number of countries. He fears GM might object to photographs of one of their 35,000 worldwide parts suppliers. Instead, he drives me to a factory that makes racks and bins for refrigerators and stoves.

Dozens of workers toil feverishly, mostly with older machinery. But I'm only allowed to photograph the two employees working at an $800,000 state-of-the-art machine that practically spits out the racks. The owner proudly explains that it's the only one of its kind in Latin America.

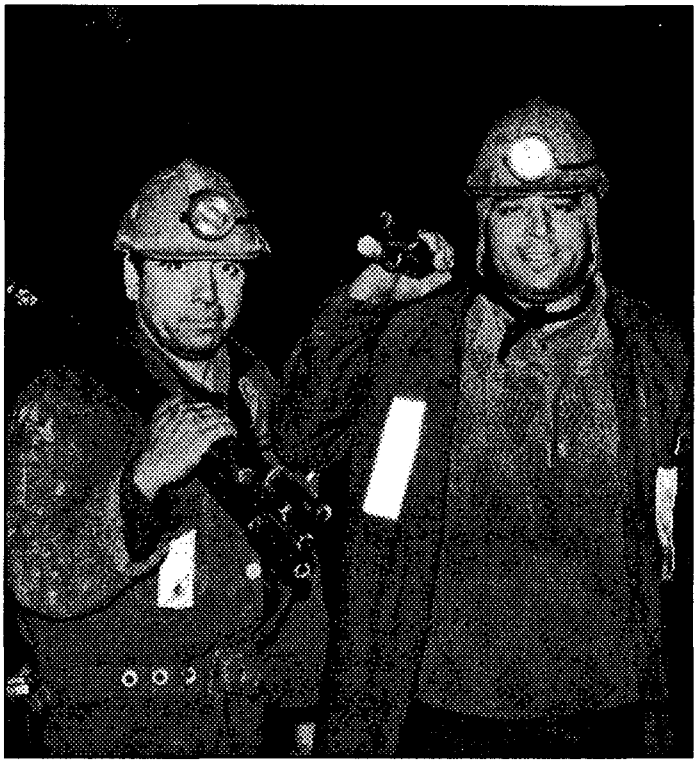
There's little question as to how he was able to afford it: He pays the workers in his plants miserably. Even when they pile overtime on their basic 48-hour, six-day workweek, their earnings—roughly equivalent to $200 per month—still leave them below Chile's official poverty line.

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And they're not alone: Despite the appearance of an economic boom, an astounding 45 percent of Chileans with jobs are in the ranks of the nation's poor. While unemployment is low and poverty rates are down somewhat since the return to elected government in 1990, social services continue to deteriorate and the share of national income going to wages continues to drop.

In this nation, whose population is expected to reach 15 million this year, more than a million workers—20 percent of the labor force—operate in the "informal" economy. More than 12 percent do home labor, and nearly 40 percent have no retirement coverage. Even for those working within the "formal" economy, speedup, subcontracting and the use of temporary workers bring ever more instability to their already precarious lives.

Autoworkers I speak with during a lunch break outside their plant make it clear that Chilean workers know they've been left out of the boom. "It's very hard to live," says one, as others nod in agreement. "We need changes, but it's very hard to change the current system. The bosses like it just the way it is."



Workers from Chile's El Teniente copper mine.

Unfortunately for the country's working poor, other Chileans—including those who were once sharp critics of the Pinochet dictatorship and its policies—have also accommodated themselves to the system. Many who in the early and mid-'80s penned fierce denunciations of the neoliberal economic model now embrace "neo-structuralism," a kinder, gentler version of neoliberalism tinctured with moderate social intervention. Nowhere is this shift clearer than with Chile's Socialist Party, a major partner of the ruling Concertación coalition that won both the 1989 and 1993 presidential elections. "These reformed socialists are comfortable with Newt Gingrich," quipped one foreign labor official based in Chile.

International pressure prodded the dictatorship to restore the appearance of labor rights—or, in the words of Pinochet's labor minister, to defer to "the values of democracy and liberty"—with its 1979 labor code. While the code may have appeared to put a human face on the regime's anti-labor policies, it actually ensured the flexible labor market so crucial for "competitiveness." It outlawed industry-wide bargaining and barred single unions from acting as exclusive bargaining agents for a workplace, a traditional practice in pre-coup Chile. A trade union leader at Chile's privatized telephone company showed me a room full of office workers. "There are four different unions representing people in this room," he explained.

Under the 1979 code, collective agreements can be negotiated only for workers at a single enterprise and are limited to covering wages. Trade union organization beyond that level has been banned, and so have unions for seasonal workers (a special blow to the nation's impoverished and exploited agricultural workers). The right to strike has been rendered all but useless, dues checkoff outlawed, and employers have formed their own "bargaining groups." And, just in case any stray subversives still manage to slip through, anyone who held union office prior to the 1973 coup has been banned from doing so since union elections were allowed again in the early '80s. So much for "democracy."

"Liberty," too, has taken on a perverse meaning for Chilean workers. They have been given the "freedom" to provide their own entirely self-financed 401(k)-type retirement accounts. These private pensions have replaced the government-run social security system, which was partly funded by employer contributions. Chileans also enjoy the "right" to choose expensive private health care over a government system that has been bled dry. A voucher scheme gives them the "right" to choose between increasingly lousy public and for-profit schools, both of which suffer from decreasing government financing.

Despite such setbacks, Chile's militant union tradition has never completely died. Unions played a major role in restoring electoral democracy to Chile, organizing much of the "no" vote in the 1989 plebiscite on whether Pinochet's rule should be extended. Since the return to electoral politics, some labor-friendly reforms have been passed, but these have done little to strengthen the rights of workers or to limit corporate power. The Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT)—Chile's counterpart to the AFL-CIO—has been legalized and reconstituted, but it has not been able to match the pre-coup level of labor organization (33 percent at its peak, less than half that now); in fact, it lost 40,000

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members in 1993. Five years of civilian government have given little voice to workers or their organizations in the country's government, in part because Pinochet, as commander in chief of the military, retains the right to appoint nine senators and thus can ensure himself a right-wing majority in the Senate.

The political muscle of CUT and other Chilean labor unions will be tested in the near future. Formal negotiations to bring Chile into the NAFTA bloc are scheduled to begin this month. In contrast to labor leaders in Mexico, who smiled while government officials walked Mexican workers off the NAFTA plank, Chilean labor leaders have been sharply critical of the treaty's impact on workers and have called upon union workers in all the NAFTA countries to stand together.

CUT President Manuel Bustos, who boasts a long rap sheet of political jailings and exiles during the Pinochet dictatorship, decries "the race to the bottom" that puts workers in competition with each other across borders. Business leaders in Chile charge Bustos with being more concerned about protecting U.S. jobs than promoting work for Chileans, but he lashes right back. "It's good that we support U.S. workers," he says. "I don't want U.S. companies coming here to pay miserable wages and damage employment in the U.S. at the same time. When I defend the rights of U.S. workers, I defend my rights, too. We want real development here in Chile that will improve life. That's why we want social clauses in trade agreements dealing with bargaining, pension and retraining rights for workers."

The new director of a rapidly modernizing textile factory speaks eagerly of Chile's coming entrance into NAFTA, confident that the factory will then increase exports to the United States. He tells Andres Hernandez, the plant's union president, to show me around. "It's your factory, too," he tells Hernandez.

Hernandez knows better. "Corporations see Chile as a giant warehouse and distribution center for them, with our good ports, infrastructure and advanced communications," he explains. "If our unions had the strength and the strong laws we once had, they wouldn't be pushing NAFTA on us next—they'd pick another country."

How successfully Chile's unions can wage a grass-roots campaign for social and environmental clauses, and how much clout they can gain with Chile's government, is unclear. Leaders like Bustos—who has strong ties to the Christian Democratic Party and reportedly wants to run for the Senate—are in a bind similar to that of many U.S. labor leaders, who remain loyal to a political party that shows little loyalty to workers in return.

There are signs of Chilean unions beginning to engage in internal education and coalition efforts against NAFTA, but their task is daunting.

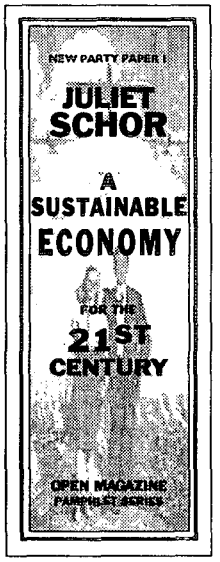
The fight against adding Chile to NAFTA, like the fight against adding Mexico, is in a sense symbolic: The economic and social ravages of free trade are already known to the working poor like Valeria, a health-rights and community organizer in one of the vast shantytowns hidden away from Santiago's prosperous center. Her husband, Jorge, puts in more than 80 hours a week as an "independent contractor" bus driver. He earns less than $50 in a good week, when his bus doesn't break down.

"When I first heard about NAFTA I was angry," Valeria explains. "But then I realized that much of NAFTA is already implemented here in Chile, and the workers are treated badly.

"What we have to fight for," she adds, "is a movement to raise real alternatives for the people." ◁

Fred Solowey, a veteran labor journalist and former Chile Solidarity activist, is co-editor of *The New Labor Press: Journalism for a Changing Union Movement* (Cornell ILR Press). He is a member of the National Writers Union.

The New Party Papers

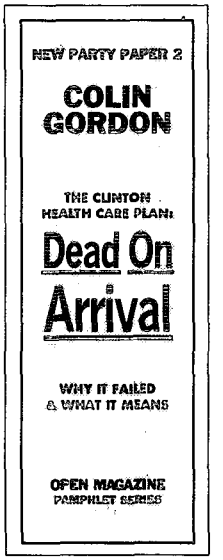


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ECONOMY

The great divide

When it comes to disparities in wealth and income, the American economy is far less equal than others.

By David Moberg

It's time for this year's Dubious Distinction Award in economics, and once again the United States is the easy winner: It has far and away the greatest inequality in both wealth and income of all major industrialized countries, according to two recent studies. And it is growing more unequal at a faster rate than virtually everyone else, as well.

Such an achievement flies in the face of the image of the United States as an egalitarian country populated by one big happy middle class. Early in this century, extremes of wealth and poverty were far more pronounced in northern European countries than in the United States. Now, inequality in the United States is so extreme that New York University professor Edward N. Wolff argues it's far outside the mainstream of the industrialized world.

But does it really matter? Apologists for the status quo argue that such inequality is necessary to generate investment and reward risk-taking, thereby creating a prosperous economy. Besides, they say, Americans aren't bothered by the presence of an unprecedented number of millionaires in their midst. Certainly U.S. citizens are far less likely than most Europeans to favor government action to equalize incomes.

Today, many liberals have simply given up on the fight for income equality, while conservatives actively promote policies that will further concentrate both wealth and income in the hands of the upper class.

But it is wrong to celebrate or even ignore inequality. It's not just a question of fairness. As much as congressional Republicans may argue otherwise, inequality is bad for society and damaging to national economic performance.

In *Top Heavy*, a new study for The Twentieth Century Fund, Wolff reports that in 1989 the top 1 percent of U.S. households controlled 39 percent of the nation's "marketable wealth" (that is, real estate, securities and so on) and 48 percent of the financial wealth. If social security and pensions are included, the share of the top 1 percent declines, but the trend remains the same.

In many ways differences in wealth are more important than differences in income. As economists define it, "wealth" includes income-generating property, such as stocks and bonds, as well as personal assets, such as homes and cars. Income, by contrast, is the money received from wages, property, pensions or government programs. Wealth—especially in stocks, bonds and business shares—is crucial because it provides both economic and political power and family financial security.

Essentially, the study shows that the rich were able to capture almost all the new wealth and much of the income generated in the '80s. From 1983 to 1989, the richest 1 percent obtained 62 percent of the increase in marketable wealth. During the same period, the bottom four-fifths of all American households captured only 1 percent of the nation's increase in wealth—and so its share of the wealth dropped by one fifth. Looking only at financial wealth, the bottom four-fifths actually *lost* 3 percent, while the top 1 percent captured 66 percent of the increase.

In a new international comparative study on income inequality, economist Timothy Smeeding of Syracuse University reports that "America has the most inequality of any modern nation we've looked at." From 1983 to 1989, according to Wolff, the top 1 percent garnered 37 percent of the gains in real income, while the bottom 80 percent got only 24 percent. Only in Britain has the rise of inequality

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been greater, and there only slightly more. In the United States, Smeeding says, not only has the gap between the highest and lowest earners been greater than in any other industrial country, but welfare state policies that redistribute income have also been weakest. As a result, America's poorest are in absolute terms poorer than people in a comparable position in most European countries.

There's a link between the good fortune of the rich and the misfortune of the rest. "The rich have gotten richer because the middle class and poor have gotten poorer," Wolff explains. "Keeping wages low has caused property income and stock prices to increase, which has shown up in increased wealth and income of the rich." This was intensified in the takeover and leveraged buy-out craze, which enriched a handful of speculators while driving down wages of workers in debt-laden companies. Similarly, the boom in the stock market over the last decade and a half has served to further enrich the already rich, who tend to put their money in stocks. In contrast, the major investments of middle-class families are their homes—which have appreciated less in value than stocks have.



Top Heavy relies on figures from the years before 1990. According to Wolff, inequality has increased even more rapidly since then. Since 1989, middle-class family incomes have declined in real terms. And ordinary Americans can no longer cope with the earnings squeeze by sending another family member off to work, because so many families already rely on two wage earners. Private pensions are less common, and Social Security is more insecure than ever. Republican policies, from tax breaks for the rich to cutbacks in welfare or middle-class student loan programs, will only make things worse.

What does the United States get in return for this inequality, which supposedly creates savings and rewards entrepreneurs? There is no more social mobility or economic growth in the United States than in other industrial countries. And our lower unemployment rate comes at a high price for workers: Nearly one-fourth of the workforce here now earns less in real terms than the 1968 minimum wage.

And there is a growing body of evidence that inequality, rather than promoting economic growth, actually hurts the economy. For both industrialized and developing countries, economists have found that where inequality is greatest, economic growth is slowest. For example, a recent study of 41 countries found that the countries that performed the best from 1960 to 1985 had the strongest educational systems and the lowest levels of inequality of income and wealth. A British study of industrialized countries from 1979 to 1990 similarly showed that the strongest performers typically had the most egalitarian distribution of income.

Economists are unsure why inequality has this negative effect, but University of Massachusetts-Boston professor Arthur MacEwan suggests four possible reasons. First, he argues, high inequality leads to conflict and social disorder, which is bad for business. Second, the relatively high wages in countries with more egalitarian distributions of income tend to push employers to purchase labor-saving machinery, which increases productivity. Third, workers are more motivated to work if they feel economic rewards are fairly distributed and wages are relatively high. Fourth, greater equality leads to more spending on health and education, since people are more likely to identify their own well-being with improving the health care and schooling of the whole society.

Currently, the opposite dynamic is at work in American society. New York University associate professor Roland Benabou notes that rich Americans may flee to the suburbs to get better education for their kids, then refuse to help pay for inner-city education. But, while their children gain an advantage, society overall becomes less efficient and productive because of the ill-trained city workers, and even the suburban children may lose. Several recent studies conclude that even within the United States, the metropolitan economies with the greatest disparity between urban and suburban incomes perform the worst. The "savage inequality" of our educational system (to borrow Jonathan Kozol's term) thus perpetuates and worsens income inequality in the broader society, especially at a time when only highly educated workers can hold their own.

None of the new critics of inequality would disagree with the importance of savings and investment. But, as Benabou has argued, it's "not just how much of national income is saved and invested in human capital" that counts, but to whom it goes. "How income gets distributed matters not just for justice but also for efficiency," he argues.

In short, inequality is not only wrong; it's bad business as well. ◀

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FOREIGN POLICY

Laos trap

America's POW-driven foreign policy keeps Laos the forgotten economic power in Southeast Asia.

By Dave Lindorff
LUANG PRABANG, LAOS

On a lone hill in the center of this old royal capital of Laos stands a small Buddhist shrine boasting a stunning 360-degree panorama of the city and its surrounding mountains. Given the prime location, it is hardly surprising that when the insurgent Pathet Lao took over the city 20 years back, they installed a swivel-mounted Chinese anti-aircraft gun beside the stupa to ward off further attacks from American warplanes. Today, the gun is gone, but the swivel mount remains on its concrete pad. On a recent Sunday morning, while the hill was ablaze in the blood-red blossoms of the fire tree, two teenage girls cut short their math study and took turns gleefully spinning each other around on the gun mount.

Laos is full of such ironies. In the lobby of Luang Prabang's radio station is the lower, finned end of a cut-up, unexploded 500-pound U.S. bomb. Filled to within a few inches of the top with sand, its sawed-off rim hammered out into a decorative bulge, the bomb now extinguishes cigarette butts.

But perhaps the biggest irony is that Laos, which was the target of a deadly decade-long U.S. "secret war" against its rural populace, is now suffering a "secret peace." During the secret war, the CIA armed and financed a suicidal counterinsurgency by minority Hmong tribespeople against the Pathet Lao guerrillas, and directed the dropping of over 2 million tons of bombs (more ordnance than the Allies dropped on Europe in all of World War II) on a country the size of Great Britain. Hardly a secret to the people of Laos, this war was hidden only from American citizens.

Now, a quarter of a century after being gratuitously included in the misnamed "Vietnam" war, Laos is being excluded from American efforts to develop economic and trade ties in the region. With the Cold War over, America is moving toward normalizing relations with Vietnam. Lured by the prospect of a market of 70 million consumers, American business is rallying to have Most Favored Nation (MFN) trade status extended to America's former enemy. Yet Laos, always an incidental victim of the Indochina conflict, bombed incessantly but at war with no one but itself, continues to suffer for its imaginary sins—a victim of America's irrational obsession with the MIA issue.

There are some signs of softening on the U.S. side. In late May, the U.S. government decided to "waive" a 20-year-long ban on humanitarian aid to Laos because the country's "cooperation in the MIA search has been very good," in the words of one embassy official. Ironically, the ban on aid is being lifted just as Newt Gingrich and Jesse Helms have moved to eliminate virtually all aid from the federal budget. So, once again, Laos is likely to be left behind.

Young men in blue jeans and T-shirts and young women in traditional embroidered silk skirts jam the road from the Vientiane airport into the capital of Southeast Asia's poorest and least populous country. Brightly painted, three-wheeled tuktuks, heavily laden trucks and the occasional car all vie for space on the dusty two-lane road.

It's hard to believe that this nation of 4 million still has a per capita income of just $200 a year. Hard to believe, too, that it's one of the world's last remaining communist states. The hammer and sickle, removed from the national flag and the nation's paper currency, the kip, is hard to find anywhere. In the old royal capital of Luang Prabang, the only one I managed to see was on a seedy storefront, barred and locked on a workday. It proved to be the regional party headquarters.

When the Pathet Lao took power, they set out (with backing from the Soviet Union) to create a centrally run, collectivist society. But a mass exodus of a quarter of the country's population (including most of the educated elite),

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combined with the inexperience and bureaucratic incompetence of the party's officials, left the country's economy stagnating for 10 years.

Things began to move in 1986, when the party decided to introduce free-market reforms. Today, roads are being constructed to connect previously inaccessible hamlets, and dams and hydroelectric power stations have made electricity cheap (where available). Indeed, electric power has become the nation's single biggest export—most of it going to neighboring Thailand. Consumer goods, from Australian milk to Japanese boomboxes, are readily available in the bigger cities—at least to those who can afford the costly commodities. Today, the country offers some of the most liberal terms for foreign investment in Asia—promising potential investors the right of 100 percent ownership, and unrestricted repatriation of profits.

Ironically, there cannot by definition be POWs in Laos—because officially the United States was never at war there.

The ruling Lao People's Revolutionary Party still retains absolute power, but this is a communist regime with a difference. There are no statues glorifying some great "people's hero," though there is a major new museum planned for the late party leader Kaysone Phomvihane. Even the U.S. State Department, in its most recent human rights report on Laos, was hard-pressed to find violations to rival those of its neighbors. The one extrajudicial killing cited was of a youthful motorcyclist who ran a roadblock. (His police slayers were jailed for the incident.) Several government officials recently received 14-year prison terms for allegedly opposing the communist government, though Laotian officials say the prisoners were convicted for other, non-political crimes.

Meanwhile, one sees little of the two worst side-effects of market reforms currently bedeviling Laos' two communist neighbors. Corruption in Laos is relatively rare. And despite a widening income disparity between city dwellers and the country's subsistence farmers, there has so far been no significant urban migration. Vientiane and Luang Prabang have no street-side tent cities, no hordes of day laborers sleeping on sidewalks and in alleyways. Farmers, who for the most part own their land, prefer the security of what little they have over the uncertainties of urban contract- or day-labor.

The lack of corruption may owe something to the country's pervasive Buddhism. Where the communist party of China, and to a lesser extent that of Vietnam, repressed Buddhism—in China's case actually sacking temples and imprisoning monks during the Cultural Revolution—temples abound in Lao towns and cities, and saffron-robed monks can be seen everywhere. "Just about everyone in the party is a Buddhist," explains Khamkhong Kongvongsa, an official in the Information Ministry. His 22-year-old son, a civil engineering student, is about to enter a monastery for a few weeks, a traditional party rite of passage.

But while Laos has largely escaped the scourge of official corruption, it suffers from other grave social ills. Infant mortality is double the rate in China and India, average life expectancy is only 49, and foreign investment—the engine of growth in the rest of Asia—is still low, about $200 million last year. The country's growth rate of of 7 percent a year is not bad, if not spectacular, by Asian standards. But the World Bank says Laos, with a workforce of 2 million, needs to create 53,000 new jobs a year just to keep unemployment at 3 percent.

Yet American sanctions against Laos persist. At a time when President Clinton, reversing the position he took during the campaign, has decided to ignore similar abuses in China and Vietnam, there has been no talk of talk of granting Laos MFN status. Without that designation, Laotian exports—primarily textiles—will continue to be saddled with tariffs of up to 100 percent in the United States, the world's biggest potential market.

Despite all the changes in U.S. policy in Southeast Asia, relations with Laos remain, in the words of one official, "dictated by [U.S.] domestic policy"—in other words, an obsession with the prickly political issue of POWs and MIAs. The Laotian government claims, not unreasonably, that all prisoners listed as "missing" died long ago—either in combat or in captivity. "It's ridiculous to say we're keeping any of these people prisoner 20 years after the war ended," says a Laotian information official. Nevertheless, in an attempt to cooperate, his government has permitted U.S. teams to search for the purported MIAs.

U.S. Embassy officials wouldn't speak on the record about this sensitive subject, but sources outside the embassy say local diplomatic officials are privately embarrassed by the U.S. position. Still, the No. 1 mission of the U.S. Embassy in Laos remains MIAs. In the dreary, bunker-like main building, from which CIA officials a generation ago directed the so-called "secret war" against "liberated" Laos, the single biggest piece of artwork on the walls is a large poster featuring the silhouette of an American soldier, a watchtower and some strands of barbed wire, over the words "POW-MIAs, we will not forget you." Ironically, there cannot by definition be prisoners of war in Laos—because officially the United States was never at war there.

There is a final irony. President Clinton has claimed his avoidance of the draft during the Indochina war was an act of principle. Even former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara now admits that the war was a "terrible mistake." Yet with 20 years' distance, and a new generation of Lao people so removed from the war that they can confuse an anti-aircraft gun with a merry-go-round, this same president is so frightened by the POW/MIA lobby that he cannot bring himself to do the right thing. ◀

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IN THE ARTS

Crumb's way

Terry Zwigoff's* Crumb *chronicles the bizarre life and times of the comix king.

By Pat Dowell

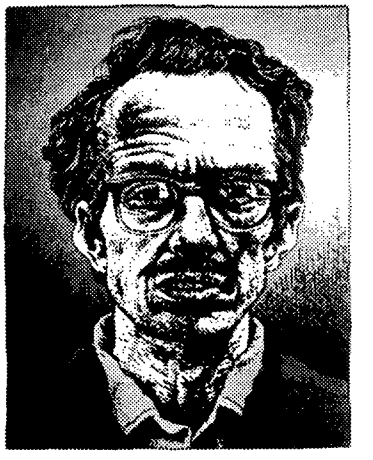
"I'm not a very romantic person," Robert Crumb says in Terry Zwigoff's documentary *Crumb*. Just in case you've forgotten the undigested horror and humor of the cartoons that make this one of the great understatements of all time, take a look at this intimate portrait of the archetypal underground artist of the '60s.

His work has left an enduring mark on American popular culture, from the underground comic characters Mr. Natural and Fritz the Cat to the album cover he did for Big Brother and the Holding Company. It's a legacy that's made him famous, if not proud. The album cover netted him only $600, and he calls the animated film Ralph Bakshi made of Fritz "an embarrassment to me for the rest of my life."

Eventually, Crumb did get rich—this documentary catches up to him in 1993, when he had just traded a briefcase of drawings for a house in the south of France. Director Zwigoff follows R. Crumb as he packs up his California home, exploring Crumb's surroundings, his psyche, his working habits and his vision of the world.

This is the compleat R. Crumb, right down to the size of his penis ("one of the largest in the world" attests an ex-girlfriend) and the deeply demented family from which he sprang. In fact, the Crumb clan and Robert's childhood almost steal the movie. It's a wonder he lived through it at all, since his two brothers, Charles and Maxon, seem irreparably damaged. (Robert's two sisters declined to be filmed.) The elder brother, Charles, is practically a movie in himself: the family's original mad comix genius who faded away into a doughy recluse (but still a ghostly and erudite raconteur) living with their batty mom in Philadelphia. Maxon, a painter who is subject to seizures and criminal compulsions, meditates on a bed of nails. Robert alone survived to tell the tale, fashioning an excoriating cartoon style that well serves his own paranoid deconstruction of every illusion of safety, generosity and warmth that American society has to offer. His sense of the utter hypocrisy of normal life is a personal experience; beneath the Ozzie-and-Harriet exterior of his own childhood dwelt the beast.

As an old friend of Robert's, Terry Zwigoff has the advantage of intimacy, and his film conveys a sense of years spent closely examining the Crumb phenomenon. Indeed, Zwigoff began filming five years ago—which is why, as the movie unfolds, the plot thickens. (Zwigoff has begged journalists not to give away these developments.)

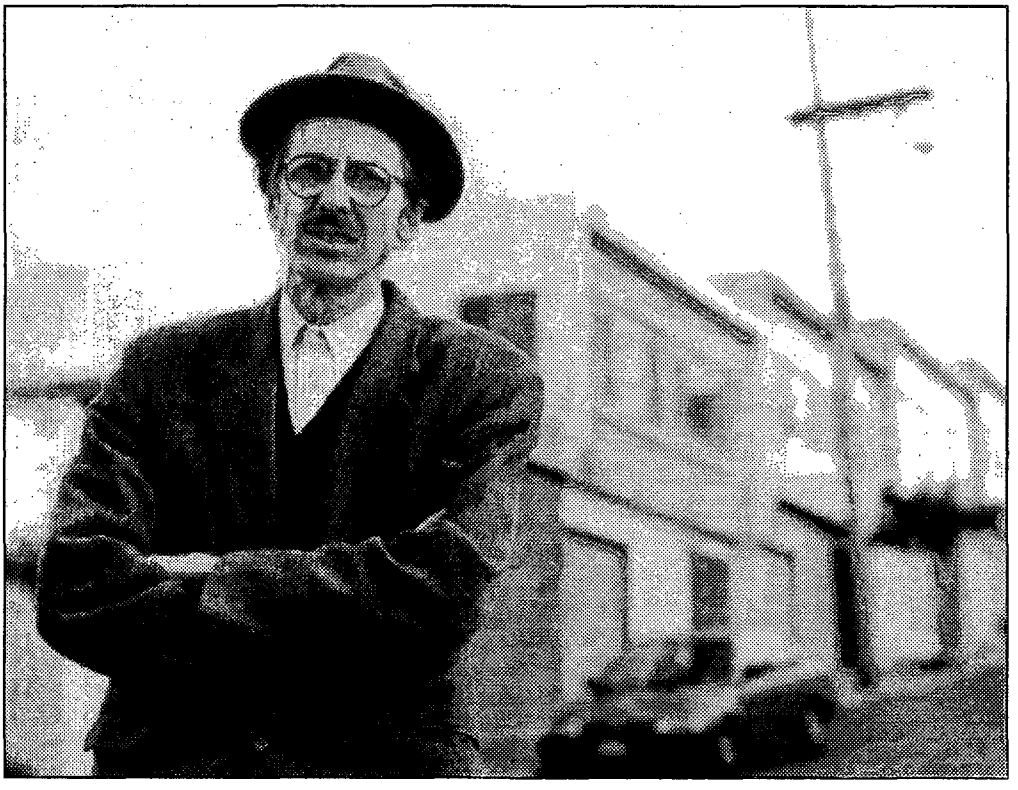


Crumb
Directed by Terry Zwigoff

The Crumbs are clearly the sort of family who give dysfunctional a bad name, but the movie is more than a tabloid peek through the keyhole. It also illuminates Robert's technique and sensibility. In one remark-

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ably astute scene, the artist and his grown son are sketching from a book of 19th-century photos of madwomen. The father's eye for detail is astounding. And we take an acid-etched stroll with Robert down a skid-row street in San Francisco. The rail-thin, seedy, middle-aged artist with his preposterously thick spectacles looks pretty down and out himself, but his unflinching eye and racing brain provide a running commentary on the everyday horrors that are driving him to sell his California home and move to France.



Zwigoff doesn't shy away from the charges of misogyny and racism that have been leveled at Crumb. The film amply illustrates the artist's explosive ambivalence toward women with a blow-by-blow guided tour of the infamous comic-book segment, "A Bitchin' Bod," in which Mr. Natural bestows on the drooling nerd named Foont one of Crumb's imposing Amazons. She's had a slight alteration—she's lost her troublesome head. But the voluptuous body remains intact, much to the men's satisfaction. Like all of Crumb's most fearsome work, this too is drawn with such convincing viciousness that it is hard to sort the satire from the attitudes being ridiculed.

Zwigoff brings in feminist observers who seem to take Crumb rather too literally; one makes the rather sweeping observation that Crumb is "very irresponsible to put dangerous sexual fantasies on paper and make them available to the public."

Defender Robert Hughes, *Time* magazine's art critic, is just as pompous: In his luxuriantly upmarket Aussie twang he proclaims that the story "is not an a-pol-o-gia for beheading." Hughes is probably right, however, to compare Crumb to Goya and Daumier. Satire has never been pretty.

Zwigoff explores the racism charge as well, but rather more perfunctorily. Crumb makes his own best defense of such notorious comix as the one featuring a wholesome white family who eagerly sit down to a dinner of canned "Niggerhearts." The outrage over such depictions "all came from white liberals," he says. What often escapes those aggrieved by Crumb is that he is not so much a misogynist or an insensitive white guy as a raving misanthrope who "vomits up," as one commentator aptly puts it, all that he finds repugnant in humankind. Another calls his art "id in its pure form."

But I wonder about that id. Crumb's terrified obsession with sex has arrested adolescent written all over it. His fear of women, so palpable in the hulking Venuses that spill from his pen, is rooted in a fear of sex that is itself buried in a bedrock revulsion toward his own body. His current wife, Aline Kaminsky, a cartoonist (*Twisted Sisters*), cogently observes that Robert Crumb "would rather be a brain in a jar than in a body." Of their sex life together, she says, "we concentrate on *my* body."

The details of his childhood—the abusive parents clinging desperately to appearances as the children's psyches melt down—suggest survival by massive denial. Crumb's drawings are, in a sense, a chilling epitaph for a man who lost the capacity to feel unalloyed pleasure decades ago. He survived, perhaps, but at what a cost to himself—and what a payoff for everyone else. That's the art game. Terry Zwigoff's documentary encompasses these speculations and more, and that richness is Zwigoff's achievement—to have made a film that does justice to the complexity of a human life.

At times *Crumb* achieves a level of intellectual intimacy that seems crushing in its own right; one is tempted to ask, what's the point of all this? Perhaps the movie is the ultimate groupie grope of R. Crumb, but it's unforgettable, from its biggest idea to its smallest. If the movie has a leitmotif, it is the ubiquitous sound of Robert Crumb's compulsive giggle, a mirthless little monotone that sounds eerily similar to the mutterings of Beavis and Butt-Head. It is Crumb's automatic response to anything that gets through his first line of defense. If you sat down with him and watched this movie, I bet you'd never hear the end of it. ◀

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In public view

PBS' pathbreaking P.O.V. series debuts a new season.

By Pat Aufderheide

If you're interested in sharks, or World War II or learning to cook, commercial television has documentaries galore for you. But nowhere on the menu of even the largest cable system is the kind of documentary you find on public TV's *P.O.V.*, whose annual season begins June 6 (check local listings). This summer, a homeless girl, an entire convention of Tourette's syndrome sufferers and aged veterans of a bloody textile strike all get platforms on the small but sturdy public space the series provides.

For eight years, *P.O.V.* has committed itself to showcasing the work of independent film- and videomakers. In the process, the series has established an engaging balance of emotional revelation and social insight. It has also become a target of right-wing hatred for airing such programs as *Tongues Untied* (1991, an essay on black gay identity) and *Passin' It On* (1994, a positive portrait of a Black Panther).

But the series does not locate itself neatly on a left/right axis. Some of its programs do make liberal political arguments; this year, in *Satya* (June 13), Tibetan nuns protest Chinese persecution of Buddhists. Some programs feature perspectives from "underdog" voices, such as in Sandra Sunrising Osawa's *Lighting the Seventh Fire* (July 4), which chronicles anti-Indian racism in northern Wisconsin. But as a whole, the programs are united most by their exploration, through grass-roots and offbeat perspectives, of what it means to be humane in a culturally pluralist society.

P.O.V.'s choices reflect a vigorous trend in documentary. Aided by the ever-more-accessible technology of the camcorder, more and more people are making documentaries that tell stories from the many cultural fly-over zones that commercial TV misses. The documentaries in this year's *P.O.V.* season nicely showcase the resulting range of expression.

Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter, which opened the *P.O.V.* season on June 6, superbly exemplifies the possibilities of personal documentary. Deborah Hoffmann, an award-winning editor of independent films such as *Ethnic Notions*, *The Times of Harvey Milk* and *Common Threads*, never intended to make a movie about coping with her mother's Alzheimer's disease. She began tape-recording phone conversations and videotaping her mother, partly as a record and partly as proof that the seemingly unreal and bizarre course of her mother's illness had really happened.

The resulting film tells the story of how she came to terms with her changing relationship, in ways that provoke laughter and wonder as well as heightened awareness of the ordeal of Alzheimer's. Sitting at her desk, she explains in a slightly bemused voice the stages of disintegration, which are then given intertitles and elaborated: "The Banana Period," for instance, when her mother can't remember that she just ate a banana, or "The Hearing Aid Period." The irritating and the terrifying jostle up against each other when, for instance, her mother wanders out and can't remember where she lives.

Hoffmann's wry, contained tone carefully reins in the horror and sadness of the process. Pain becomes devastatingly effective punctuation. In one heartbreaking moment, Hoffmann plays back her mother's voice on the answering machine, as she berates herself miserably for her forgetfulness and begs for her daughter's patience.

Hoffmann's ability to distance herself from such painful scenes focuses the story on reconstructing a relationship rather than on coping with the challenges of caregiving. She constructs a new and profoundly loving relationship with a

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Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter
Directed by Deborah Hoffmann

mother who no longer remembers her, who sometimes thinks she's a college chum and sometimes a neighbor from her youth. There are odd solaces. Her mother had once disapproved of Hoffmann's lesbianism, but now enjoys the warmth of family outings and can only see the reality of love in the present. There are also surprises; once snobbish, her mother now cheerily revels in daytime TV's excesses.

Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter is something all too rare in documentaries. It models exemplary behavior modestly. It introduces us to people we feel privileged to know, and whose choices we can admire. It is a work of love that can inspire others to be decent and generous.

Another standout in the season is the powerful, long-awaited *Uprising of '34*. Made by Judith Helfand and George Stoney—a venerated pioneer of social action documentaries and cable access television—it recovers lost memory and reclaims buried history.

Stoney, who grew up in North Carolina, knew about the textile strike of 1934, the biggest one-industry strike in U.S. history, which swept through cotton mills throughout the South and involved half a million people. He also knew people didn't like to talk about it: It took six years of interviewing to get the testimonies that form the core of this film.

Strikers and their children talk about what drove people off the land and into the mill towns in which owners dictated their every move. African-Americans recall—with a caution and delicacy that bespeaks enduring racism—the ugly segregation that kept them shut out of jobs. Mill owners and their children, meanwhile, recall the era as one of benign paternalism.

In a "revolution of hope" spurred by FDR's promise of federal support for unions, workers organized for better working conditions. Owners, militias and the National Guard responded with force, causing much bloodshed on picket lines.

The federal government, which reluctantly negotiated a national settlement, failed to back the workers when owners violated the settlement and blackballed them. The overwhelmed union was unable to support the thousands of desperate families. Some people only got their jobs back if they promised never to use the word "union" again.

No wonder Stoney and Helfand found fear and silence when they approached interview subjects. Long-repressed images of evicted families and fatherless children still bring tears to the eyes of aged strikers. "I've been trying to forget about all of that, and this is just bringin' it all back up," a woman who attended to a wounded striker says.

The film uses an oral history style well established in the '70s, in which the editing (here by the expert hand of Susanne Rostock) of interviews with members of social movements, rather than narration, tells the story. Unlike some films in the genre, *Uprising of '34* interviews people on both sides of the conflict, as well as federal labor regulators.

The history told is thus a rich one, with conflicts of race, class, region and expectation shaping the tragedy. It is also a contentious history. Stoney sees it as a challenge to "myths that Southern workers can't be organized, that they will work for nothing, and that they hate unions."

The season features several other remarkable films. *No Place Like Home* (June 13), the record of eight months filmmaker Kathryn Hunt spent with 10-year-old Barbara Wilson and her homeless mother and sister, and *Home Economics* (July 18), Jenny Cool's interviews with suburban homeowners in Los Angeles, finding pools of anxiety just beneath surface complacency, are especially strong statements.

The producers of *P.O.V.*, Ellen Schneider and Marc Weiss, have extended the platform given to documentaries by public TV into local communities and even the Internet. This year, the producers work with relevant organizations (for instance, the Tourette's Syndrome Association in conjunction with the July 11 *Twitch and Shout*) to find appropriate audiences who might not otherwise tune in. On the Internet, the program offers viewers opportunities (at info@pov.org and http://www. pbs.org/pov) to meet the filmmakers, learn about resources and begin conversations with other viewers. Schneider and Weiss also air video feedback that viewers tape on camcorders at home and mail in. In other words, the grass-roots, offbeat point of view that *P.O.V.* showcases next could be yours. ◀

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IN PRINT

The tragedy of the come-ons

By Tom Vanderbilt

Left to its own devices, advertising stubbornly resists being treated as history. After all, ad pitches serve as the great standard-bearers of the business ethos; they are premised on a perpetual revolution in goods, styles and attitudes. Quaint historical notions such as permanence and tradition are routinely washed away in successive tides of planned obsolescence.

As a profession, advertising also renounces its own past, which is fraught with dubious forbears: 19th-century nostrum peddlers, confidence men and lightning rod salesmen. Throughout the 20th century, advertisers have shaken off the dead hand of the past by carefully cultivating all the trappings of propriety befitting any other august calling: foundations, university departments and trade magazines. In its most recent bid for cultural respectability, the industry managed to get its annual awards ceremony, the Clios, broadcast on the Fox Network.

Clio, as it happens, is also the Greek muse of history, and in what seemed almost to be a divinely ordained moment in unself-conscious irony, the awards show two years ago dissolved into an unrestrained clamor for recognition. Incredibly, the winners had not been chosen in advance, and impatient ad executives stormed the stage to grab golden statuettes as madly as trading-floor speculators during a crash.

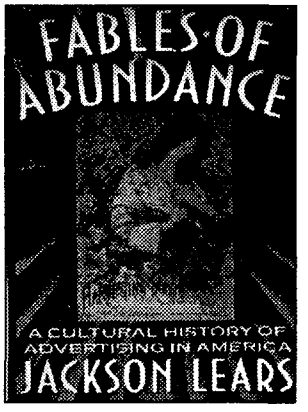
Such displays, aberrant though they seem, say much about the actual history of advertising in American culture, to judge by historian Jackson Lears' ambitious study of the emergence of the profession, *Fables of Abundance*. Industry apologists—as well as some mainstream historians—have rendered the story of advertising as an uninterrupted ascent into the dizzying heights of the "culture of abundance." But Lears (author of the influential study of fin-de-siècle "antimodernist" intellectuals, *No Place of Grace*) resists this glib interpretation. Instead of beginning where many standard histories start—with the rise of consumer culture in the 1920s—Lears sets the stage for modern advertising's emergence in the mid-19th century, when the fledgling advertising business was still steeped in the exotic, primitivist and sensual imagery of the patent medicine trade and itinerant salesmanship.

The acolytes of 19th-century advertising harkened back, in turn, to a much older tradition, Lears argues: the "carnivalesque" model of marketplace relations that prevailed in early modern Europe. In this tradition, the market was a site of the "animated world"—a place where animistic spirits could commune with matter. A constant stream of "traveling saints" moved through the early modern market, offering to "manipulate sacred objects toward practical ends"; quacks, seers, acrobats and peddlers thronged the market fairs of European trade capitals like Leipzig and Lyons—in Lears' words, "the cutting edge of the commercial revolution."

In the 19th-century American version of this culture, traveling peddlers (whom Lears dubs "the emissaries of the miraculous") offered their own modes of self-transformation, through the medium of exotic, mass-produced consumer goods. American marketeers plied everything from Oriental embroidery to the spiritually tinged psychic home remedies of mesmerism and phrenology.

But the carnivalesque component of the advertising trade came under attack in the later half of the century, Lears suggests: Protestant middle- and upper-class reformers found the protean pleasures of the market deeply unsettling to the notion of a stable, unified self—a tremendous source of anxiety for the antebellum heirs of Puritan tradition.

With the emergence of mass consumer capitalism, these reformers sought to harness the energies of the sprawling new market. As a result, the fantastic imagery of 19th-century advertising was retooled to reflect the rational values of the developing national corporate economy. Patent medicines, which once touted mystical properties and ingredients, now bore the sober pedigree of science. The fecund—and female—imagery of advertisements for farm implements gave way to notices for decidedly male threshers, harbingers of a new industrial order that would make "every farm a factory." A new obsession with sanitary virtues marked a "revulsion against biology"—and indeed, against every other kind of domestic irrationality. Women confined to the domestic sphere were no longer producers but managers. And the household no longer served as "a refuge from the calculating world outside; instead, it would mimic the steady production of the modern factory."



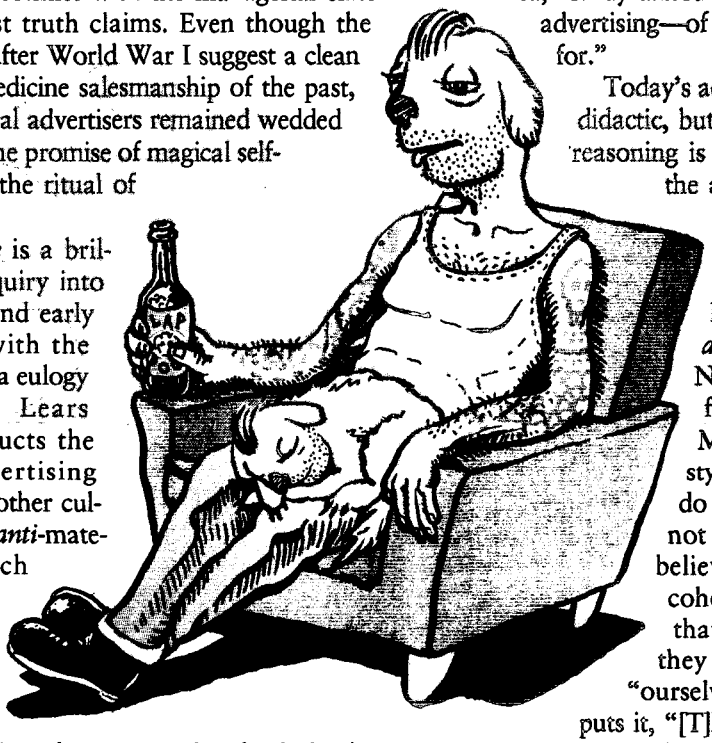
Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America
By Jackson Lears
BasicBooks
492 pp., $30

With cleanliness and order came prestige: Advertisers became key agents in the modern world's quest for rationality, efficiency and individual health. As Lears writes, advertisers were no longer "long-haired literati and bunco artists"; by 1909, the N.W. Ayer agency was advising

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would-be clients to choose admen "as you would your lawyer or your doctor." Admen began wrestling over questions like "Has Advertising Reached the Dignity of Finance?" By 1919, the transformation seemed complete: Former President William Howard Taft praised the Ayer agency's founder, Francis Wayland Ayer, as "a man who has made advertising a science, who has made it useful, and who has robbed it of its many evil tendencies."

But Lears argues that the buncombe birthright finally proved too resistant to the industry's own efforts to reinvent itself. Advertising's heritage of trickery and surface theatricality inevitably came into conflict with the managerial class' penchant for universalist truth claims. Even though the trappings of advertising after World War I suggest a clean break with the patent medicine salesmanship of the past, Lears claims that "national advertisers remained wedded to its principal strategy: the promise of magical self-transformation through the ritual of purchase."



© KIT BOYCE 1995

Fables of Abundance is a brilliant and exhaustive inquiry into the history of modern and early modern interactions with the material world. It is also a eulogy for that world, as Lears painstakingly reconstructs the process whereby advertising worked in concert with other cultural forces to create an *anti*-materialist society, in which consumerism renders goods as transitory playthings to be desired, purchased, thrown away and desired anew. He combines first-rate archival scholarship with a wide-ranging reading of literary testaments to the lingering animistic countertradition of the carnivalesque, from Bruno Schulz's *The Street of Crocodiles* to Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*. Deep meaning can still inhere in the products of the market, Lears argues—despite the impulse to dismiss what Marx called the "theological whims" of commodities as mere tokens of pecuniary emulation. What ultimately concerns Lears are "the things themselves," and he laments managerial capitalism's rigorous pursuit of the Cartesian separation of the self from worldly goods. As a result, Lears argues, we have lost the material world's promise of "imaginative transport across the threshold of everyday life into a world of exotic, sensuous abundance."

But this defense of materialism and nostalgic evocation of the carnivalesque ultimately leaves Lears in a bind regarding the excesses of contemporary consumer culture. He is, indeed, moved at one point to praise a "welcome resurgence of irony, humor, even surrealism" in advertising over the past decade. Lears' implicit point seems to be that such displays, in contrast to the "stupid realism" (in Northrop Frye's phrase) of managerial values still rampant in most advertising, could somehow reverse the drift toward postmodern antimaterialism in today's marketplace.

The easy embrace of irony and humor, however, represents a much more insidious turn in the cultural history of advertising. Irony, the impulse in TV culture that Mark Crispin Miller calls "the hipness unto death," effectively masks the same instrumentalist goals that Lears rightly criticizes in earlier 20th-century advertising—goals embodied in such heavy-handed figures as the 1926 ad icon "Andy Consumer." "I guess one reason there's so much success in America," Andy announced, "is because there's so much advertising—of things to want—things to work for."

Today's ads are nowhere near so crude and didactic, but behind their studied smirks, the reasoning is identical. Ironic statements lend the advertiser the invaluable strategy of self-protection: An ad isn't *really* a huckster's bid to disassemble the consumer's self. Indeed, it isn't even necessarily *about* a product at all. Benetton, Nike, Levi's: Cutting-edge ads now form a disorienting panorama of MTV imagery, coy semiotics and stylized gestures. What, in the end, do they add up to? Surely, they're not selling a product, we're led to believe. Instead, as they struggle to cohesively package brand identity, that most elusive of commodities, they are selling a vision of "us" to "ourselves." As Leslie Savan succinctly puts it, "[T]he cool commercials flatter us by saying we're too cool to fall for commercial values, and therefore cool enough to want their product."

Corporate advertisers have also shown us they can use "tricksters" and "subversive" figures (such as William Burroughs, Dennis Hopper and Lou Reed) as pitchmen, thereby effectively trivializing inherited notions of dissent while demonstrating how impervious consumer capitalism is to any would-be critic. Under the new ironic order, every rebel is a lapdog waiting to happen. Or, as the campaign for Red Dog beer has it, you are *your own* (lap) dog.

This is the most baleful and paradoxical promise of self-transformation that advertising now offers: In a society of masses, you are an individual because you have chosen to buy a particular mass-produced product. As the boundaries of the advertising industry widen to preordain more and more of the consumer's response to its output, the self seems to be in danger of losing its footing altogether in the marketplace. Irony is just the industry-furnished conceit that points the way down. ◀

Tom Vanderbilt is a writer based in New York City and a contributing editor of *The Baffler*.

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Social distortion

By John Buell

Political leaders and pundits may debate the finer points of dismantling the U.S. welfare system, but among social scientists, it has become commonplace to argue that America has an "underdeveloped" welfare state. The long-familiar claim is that U.S. citizens are ideologically committed to a laissez-faire state; labor and the left, meanwhile, have always lacked organizational resources to combat this worldview.

Harvard sociologist Theda Skocpol argues, however, that this analysis omits important parts of the American experience with welfare. Throughout our history, Skocpol argues, U.S. citizens have been willing to tax themselves and to spend money for programs that provide tangible benefits to many and that accord with their fundamental sense of social justice and equity.

The essays in *Social Policy in the United States* trace the origins of America's fitful embrace of broad-based social welfare programs. In the years after the Civil War, the federal government enacted a system of pensions originally designed for disabled veterans and then gradually extended it to all veterans of any ethnic or racial background who could show participation in the Union cause. The program was an early, albeit incomplete, instance of biracial welfare policy.

How have we gone from there to here—with a politics of welfare reform that is both bitterly contested and racially polarized? Skocpol offers two instructive case studies—one being the comparative success story of Social Security, which even the new GOP Congress is reluctant to slash.

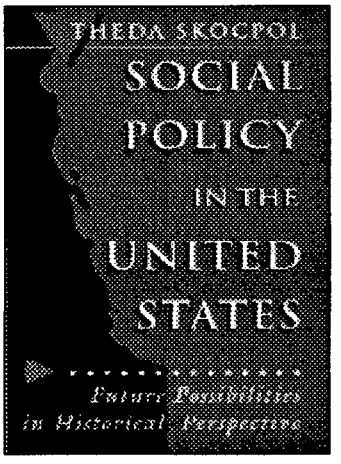
Today, when we talk about Social Security, we mean the system of federally funded pensions for retired workers. Yet the original Social Security legislation encompassed four separate programs: old-age pensions, old-age and survivors' insurance, unemployment insurance and aid to dependent children. Each of these programs has evolved in different ways, under different governing principles. Social Security soon became so popular that it was extended to virtually all workers within a generation—in much the same way that the Civil War pension plan was "universalized" shortly after its inception.

At the other end of the spectrum is Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), now facing a round of draconian cuts. The original New Deal architects of this program envisioned it as a temporary measure that would become ever less necessary as Social Security eliminated poverty among the elderly and as jobs and short-term unemployment compensation enriched the living standards of working Americans. AFDC singled out poor mothers as its beneficiaries and subjected their spending habits and personal lives to the scrutiny of social service bureaucracies. And unlike retirement pensions, AFDC was jointly financed by the federal government and the states. The net effect, Skocpol argues, was to designate a class of citizens (poor women) to receive benefits others did not share, while leaving many of those benefits hostage to the whims of state legislatures. The structure of the program, in other words, laid the foundations for later generations of politicians to vilify AFDC recipients as "welfare queens."

As the economy became sluggish in the early '70s, the number of Americans on AFDC grew. But the bitter politics of welfare cannot be explained simply by the growth of the welfare rolls. Unlike Social Security, AFDC fell prey to invidious political scapegoating. Since it was not conceived as a universal program but, rather, as a means-tested stopgap, its benefits soon became stigmatized as government "handouts." Even though conventional Social Security has modestly redistributive features, it is basically a "pay as you play" program: Everyone has to pay for Social Security, but virtually everyone benefits from the program. But while everyone pays for AFDC, its benefits go to relatively few.

The economic stagnation of the '70s fed popular perceptions of the program's unfairness. Jobs became more insecure and working conditions more demanding—and a growing number of two-income families wrestled with the grossly inadequate day-care economy. As a result, Americans started to dispute the policy of paying out benefits to people who didn't work. Since the few who benefited from AFDC were disproportionately African-Americans, such grievances also became infused with racial animosities.

The divergent histories of AFDC and Social Security pose an important historical question: Why did New Deal reformers rally behind retirement pensions and treat other assistance



Social Policy in the United States: Future Possibilities in Historical Perspective
By Theda Skocpol
Princeton University Press
326 pp., $29.95

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programs as poor second cousins? Several factors helped shape this view. New Deal economists believed that job-creating programs would render most assistance plans temporary measures. They were also reluctant to challenge the Southern Democrats' argument that assistance programs would disrupt agricultural labor patterns in the South.

But Skocpol also notes another, largely neglected, political factor. The widespread practice of distributing Civil War pensions as spoils of office prompted many New Dealers, heirs to the progressive reform tradition of "good government," to distrust any program based on unearned government benefits. Any program not based at least in part on participant contributions, they argued, would be subject to partisan abuse—hence the pay-as-you-play structure of Social Security.



New Dealers wanted a welfare system that was both fair and efficient; today's welfare state is neither. Skocpol argues that the contemporary welfare debate needs to take fresh stock of the goals of New Deal reformers: Programs to aid the least well off and most despised must be part of a broader welfare-state agenda that benefits most middle- and working-class Americans. A key component of this agenda, she argues, is family protection. Skocpol outlines a broad family protection plan, which would include federal child-support standards and enforcement, a child-care credit and paid parental leave. Moreover, she argues that the universal scope of a successful family protection policy would permit greater benefits to be extended to the poor on both an aggregate and proportional basis.

Yet some elements of Skocpol's case for a more universal welfare politics could well hinge on a false dichotomy. While she is keenly attuned to the role of race in welfare, Skocpol seems to suggest that it is necessary to choose between a universal or class politics and a race-conscious politics. At times, the universalist case has an "after the revolution" ring to it, implying that race- and gender-based grievances must await the resolution of the grittier, more fundamental problems of class.

If anything, however, the goals of racial justice and assistance to the poor seem to work best in concert. One could just as well read Skocpol's evidence as supporting the case for a more direct New Deal assault on racism, which could have more effectively created a broad working- and middle-class coalition for universal welfare and full employment. University of Wisconsin historian Linda Gordon has argued, for example, that the Depression-era consensus on welfare "offered a chance to break Southern control of the Democratic Party." Linking up voter-registration initiatives and anti-lynching laws to a comprehensive program of retirement pensions, unemployment compensation and full-employment could have given FDR the popular support to dump the Southern barons of the Democratic Party.

When Southern racism finally did come under political attack in the '60s, at least part of the New Deal economic vision was coming into being. An expanding economy was beginning to provide working-class citizens with better opportunities. Even though gains for African-Americans lagged behind those of working-class whites, the background of comparative economic opportunity helped make the breakthroughs of the civil rights movement possible.

The corollary lesson is clear: When economic equity is detached from the struggle for racial justice, the political climate in which such questions are debated gets badly distorted. Treating racial grievances, while neglecting to address class inequalities, says to working-class whites that their suffering, unlike that of other protected groups, is deserved—it sows the seeds of backlash. Despite Skocpol's apparent disposition to treat race only indirectly, she is clearly correct to suggest that only an economy of expanding opportunities and greater social justice for the vast majority will allow that majority to address persistent patterns of racial exclusion. It is surely no coincidence that the current backlash against both welfare and affirmative action is taking place in a period of shrinking economic opportunity for working-class Americans.

Like the policy-makers of the New Deal, Skocpol stresses that full employment must be the foundation of progressive politics. However, in a society that routinely overlooks class-based politics, the abstract call for full employment seldom carries much weight, and most citizens persistently view make-work government programs with distrust. Skocpol seeks to counter such political resistance with a community-based strategy of job-creation, targeting improvements in sectors that would bear the most visible fruit, such as education, transportation and health care.

While Skocpol's recommendations are welcome, the explicitly political implications of her analysis need to be fleshed out more clearly. Any full-employment agenda will eventually have to come to terms, for example, with the chronic stagnation of the U.S. economy and the growing obsession with the national debt.

As Skocpol suggests, greater distributional justice would help prime the pump for both job growth and increased consumer spending. But such an agenda would also have to address other important structural ills of the American economy, such as the ways that multinational capital deprives

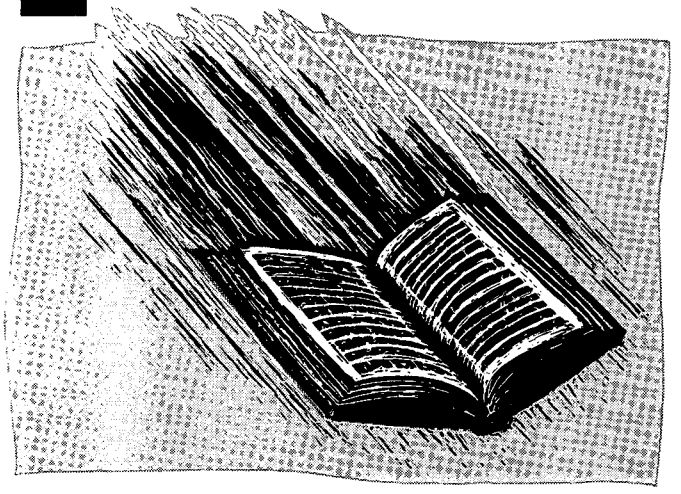
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workers of opportunities to develop their skills and to control their working conditions. Likewise, the flight of industry to cheap labor havens abroad would have to figure prominently in any debate over full employment. And finally, given the ongoing technological enhancement of productivity, family and job protection would mandate the redistribution of *work*, to guarantee workers more time for their families and for leisure.

All this requires, in turn, that we reform electoral laws and our weak, undemocratic party structures. The future course that Skocpol sketches for welfare policy needs to go beyond the descriptive diagnosis of welfare's plight and reclaim the radical tradition of "political economy." By moving the welfare debate out of the narrow realm of policy-making into the realm of serious political deliberation, we can engage the widespread present disenchantment with welfare while tapping into the time-honored vision of a universalist and just American social policy. Skocpol has, to her great credit, put this agenda back on the intellectual map. ◀

John Buell is a political journalist living in Southwest Harbor, Maine. He is the author of *Democracy by Other Means: The Politics of Work, Leisure and Environment*, which will be published in July by the University of Illinois Press.

SPEED READING



Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-1960
By Elizabeth A. Fones-Wolf
University of Illinois Press
307 pp., $16.95

Cultural conservatives have long appealed to the stock *Father Knows Best* mythology of 1950s domestic life in their crusade for family values. Likewise, "consensus" historians of the American labor movement have relied on an idealized version of postwar prosperity. The economic bounty of the late '40s and '50s, these historians reasoned, permitted labor and management to broker a unique trade-off between abundance and ideology: Most businesses tolerated the strengthened labor laws of the New Deal era, while unions largely refrained from the critiques of capitalism that fueled organizing drives during the Depression.

But just as the myth of 1950s domestic harmony glosses over deep tensions in the postwar American family—admirably chronicled in Stephanie Coontz's 1992 book *The Way We Never Were*—so has the consensus school overlooked the real, often turbulent, state of postwar labor relations. And in *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism*, Elizabeth A. Fones-Wolf has done for labor history of the postwar era what Coontz did for 1950s social history. Fones-Wolf, an assistant professor of history at West Virginia University and a former associate editor of *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, argues that "conservative opposition to New Deal liberalism never really disappeared." Correspondingly, she writes, large segments of the American labor movement—even after the postwar purge of communists—remained highly critical of the free enterprise system.

In conducting its postwar assault on labor, management found willing conscripts in the booming professions of public relations and human relations. Alarmed by the public sympathy unions marshaled during the national strike wave of 1945-46, business groups launched a multimedia attack on the "collectivist" mentality that was threatening the "free enterprise way of life."

Using corporate-sponsored magazines, speakers bureaus, radio programs and movies, business leaders extended their influence over a wide range of local and national institutions, including charities, education associations and women's organizations. Even religious groups were called upon to boost capitalist morale, with executives noting that God was "a good partner to have in the firm."

Fones-Wolf also argues, contrary to the consensus view, that labor didn't take such treatment lying down. The labor press, with more than 800 newspapers reaching 20 million readers, regularly launched broadsides against the "lackeys of big business." In 1949, CIO-affiliated unions established radio stations in New York City, Detroit, Los Angeles and Cleveland. But labor—hobbled by the split between the then-warring camps of the trade unionist AFL and the more radical CIO—could not could not match corporate America's vast resources. By 1952, the union-run radio stations in New York, Detroit and Cleveland had folded.

Throughout the book, Fones-Wolf offers an astonishing array of anecdotes and statistics—though, in a very few instances, the latter can veer toward the fast and loose. At one point, for example, she makes passing reference to company-sponsored magazines "reaching more than 80 million employees" during the late 1940s. (Yet in 1949, the total civilian workforce numbered just over 60 million.) Such lapses aside, however, *Selling Free Enterprise* provides an invaluable, richly detailed account of a long-misunderstood era of American labor history. —*Jim McNeill*

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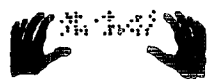
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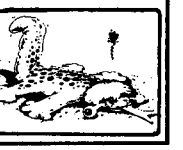
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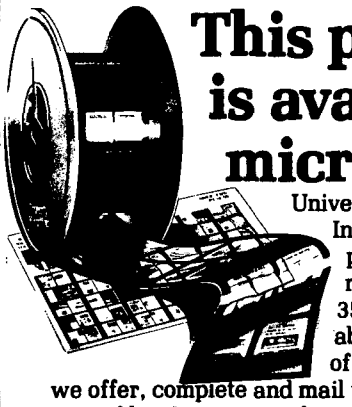
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more than $300 million in food and non-food aid.

There are certainly situations that require immediate, short-term intervention by the international community to avoid loss of human life and economic disaster. The basic dilemma, then, is how to determine what constitutes a true emergency and how best to deal with it.

A key litmus test must be the foreseeable effects of the disaster. A drought in Botswana is fairly routine. A flood in southern Somalia constitutes a blessing from Allah. Unless reliable nonpartisan sources—U.N. agencies, respectable human rights organizations, international scientific groups—can confirm the disaster as such, there may be less emergency than meets the eye. In a world of limited resources and donor fatigue, it is important to alleviate the real emergencies first.

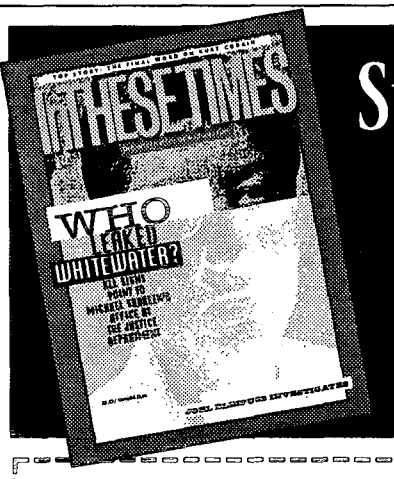
The next criteria should be the foreseeable effects of the solution. Some interventions cause more harm than the emergency itself. Providing camp-based relief supplies to Sudanese herdsmen affected by drought forces them out of a traditional nomadic way of life, leaving them more vulnerable to disaster than before. Human displacement brings its own ills: deforestation, overgrazing, the dependency syndrome and increased vulnerability to disease. Setting up camps of any kind has generally been discredited as a relief strategy, except as a last resort. The international medical relief group Médicins sans Frontières made the controversial decision to pull out of the Rwandan refugee camps in Zaire last year based on a troubled recognition that their efforts were only contributing to the continuing ethnic strife between the Hutus and Tutsis.

It is also vital to assess disaster relief in terms of who stands to gain from the intervention. National emergencies and natural disasters provide a convenient cover for other forms of intervention: The decision to alleviate drought in southern Angola in 1990 arguably had more to do with the U.S. government's interest in supporting the anti-Marxist UNITA guerrilla movement than with a real humanitarian disaster. Official French concern over the plight of rural Chadians and urban Rwandans has long been suspect on political grounds. Geopolitics continues to condition emergency responses to disaster in Africa, whether the root cause is access to natural resources, Anglo-Francophone rivalry or fear of Muslim fundamentalism.

Not all "emergencies" really merit intervention. The past decade has seen a growing current in disaster-relief literature urging greater respect for the coping mechanisms and self-reliance of rural African populations. Naturally, no one with an ounce of compassion could turn a cold shoulder on genocide, starvation or a deadly epidemic. But relief programs must be justifiable in terms of life-saving benefits, rather than sheer humanitarian sentiment. Emergency relief, like regular development aid, should redistribute resources to allow for long-term, sustainable development.

African nations are no more prone to disaster than other parts of the world; they just lack resistance to the social, political and economic fallout that inevitably ensues. To paraphrase the famous Hemingway-Fitzgerald exchange about rich people, poor nations are different from you and me—they have fewer resources. ◀

Fred Spielberg is a "disaster junkie" who currently lives in Argentina.



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Courting disaster

By Fred Spielberg

Now that the latest outbreak of the Ebola virus in Zaire has epidemiologists reaching for their textbooks, health ministers consulting their budgets and ordinary folks scrambling for an atlas, a burning question has re-emerged that no one feels quite comfortable addressing: Why Africa? Why does the Dark Continent seem so beset by disaster?

Admittedly, I tend to view Africa through a catastrophic lens. I do consulting work for humanitarian groups that provide aid during emergencies and spend much of my time in garden spots from Monrovia to Mogadishu. To people who get their information on Africa from Johnnie Weissmuller movies, that makes me an expert of sorts. I ran food to Ethiopian refugees in 1990, provided flood relief to Somalis in 1989, developed work projects for the war-displaced Southern Sudanese in 1988, and enumerated war-affected Mozambicans in 1987.



Of course, all these evils are not unique to Africa. Flood is no stranger to the Indian subcontinent. Europe wrote the book on genocidal warfare. Even California has known drought. During a given year, there are just as many officially declared natural and man-made disasters in the Americas, Europe or Asia as in Africa. The United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs (which absorbed the U.N. Disaster Relief Organization a few years back) devotes about the same amount of resources and personnel to Africa as to each of the other regions of the world. However, by almost anyone's standards, sub-Saharan Africa—the 51 or so nations lying south of the largely Arabic-speaking Maghreb countries that border the Mediterranean—has seen more than its share of mass suffering.

For one thing, the dimensions of an emergency in Africa are on an order of magnitude beyond what one would expect in other parts of the world. Riots in the streets of Los Angeles, Hamburg or Rio de Janeiro are contained in a few days and cause a couple hundred casualties at most; tribal riots in Kigali last for months, and estimates of the dead reach half a million. Why the difference?

By a singularly cruel logic, poverty begets disaster. Africa is the world's most impoverished continent, with average per capita incomes under $200 per year. It is easier for an epidemic to ravage a population that is already malnourished and has not been immunized. Likewise, a drought or flood will take a higher toll in communities whose housing and basic services are precarious to begin with.

There are pitifully few resources available for disaster prevention in African nations. Colonialism and post-colonial wars left most countries bereft of industry, infrastructure and professional classes. National budgets are overstrained trying to repay World Bank loans and to maintain the International Monetary Fund's structural adjustment policies that permit African governments to borrow more. There is little left over for "luxuries" such as emergency health plans, reforestation, or water conservation programs.

Then there are those "structural interests": Emergency relief in Africa has become an entrenched and profitable industry. Those of us who have made a living off the disaster trade (and there are quite a number) hesitate to admit it publicly, but we agree privately that disaster relief is good business. This is not to say that we who work for international agencies push emergency relief solely to enrich ourselves, or that foreigners bear all the responsibility for foisting emergencies on Africa. An emergent class of Africans in nearly every country has also learned to use the system: Generals, politicos, businessmen and a burgeoning group of entrepreneurs have established non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as a convenient channel for emergency relief.

In more than a few instances, disasters have been utilized to obtain lucrative international funding. Witness the Ethiopian refugee community in northern Somalia 1976-1991, which the ex-dictator Siad Barre armed and used as a mercenary force against his domestic Isak clan opposition. The international community, in the name of misguided humanitarianism, provided food, water, health and education to Barre's "refugee" fighters long after they had ceased to be refugees. Or consider the 1992 southern African drought, which was declared an emergency in 15 nations from Tanzania to Namibia—though it only affected isolated pockets of a few countries. The civil wars in Angola and Mozambique may well have been prolonged unnecessarily to enable all sides to milk the relief industry: The U.N. emergency appeal for Mozambique in 1988, for instance, netted

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